



## Any Way You Slice It — It's Fun to Make Your Own Bread!

By Colleen Dixon

**D**ad used to say that the three most wonderful smells in the world are free: sheets dried outdoors on the line, freshly mown grass and baking bread.

Grass clippings and bed linen are easy enough to come by for many of us, but if you want to smell fresh bread baking, you might have to make it yourself.

Men and women around the world enjoy bread making because it is a creative, economical pastime. And it's easier than you might think — the accompanying recipe, if not absolutely foolproof, is at least idiot-resistant!

Best of all, pulling fresh bread out of the oven is guaranteed to increase your popularity in the neighborhood by several notches.

### **Bready, set, go!**

Usually we think of bread as a baked dough, but archaeologists say that some ancient breads were more like dry porridge, because grains were roasted to help separate them from chaff. A modern example of this kind of bread is Tibetan *tsampa*. To make *tsampa*, simply knead some roasted barley flour with your yak butter tea. Eat the resulting paste, washed down with more yak butter tea, of course!

Less exotic are flat unleavened breads — Mexican

tortillas and Norwegian flat bread, for example. Then there are the quick breads, like scones (U.S. biscuits) and corn bread, leavened with baking soda or baking powder.

The kind of bread most of the Western world is most familiar with is yeast bread. This type includes sliced sandwich bread, French sticks, big round rye loaves and Middle Eastern pocket bread. For the rest of this article, the word *bread* means yeast bread.

### Bread basics

Although dozens of different grains and other starchy foods can be baked into bread — rice, millet, sorghum, cassava, barley and corn to name a few — wheat is by far the world's first choice. Why? Because wheat has the most *gluten*, proteins that, when moistened and kneaded, give bread strength and structure.

Gluten acts like a lot of little rubber bands that stretch to trap air bubbles produced by the yeast. When the bread is baked, the gluten hardens to keep the airy texture. That's why breads made with other grains usually also contain some wheat flour — otherwise they would be cakelike and crumbly.

**Kneading develops the gluten — those proteins that give bread strength and structure. Just look at the finished product — a hot, fragrant loaf of bread!**  
(Photos by Hal Finch)



The ancient Egyptians, who might have been first to bake leavened bread, had a saying, "Wheat or barley?" meaning, "Good news or bad news?"

Getting flour with a high enough gluten content can be a challenge in making bread at home. Different wheats vary a lot

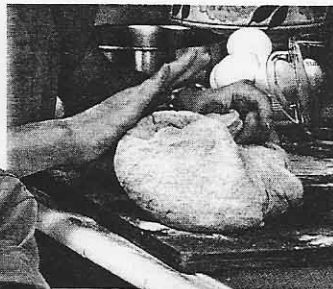
in gluten. Those high in gluten, called *hard* wheats, are ground into *strong* or *bread* flour. These grow mainly in some parts of Europe and on the Great Plains of North America. Where mainly softer wheats grow, as in Britain and Australia, bread flour might be hard to find.

The accompanying recipe assumes that you will use soft (all-purpose or plain) flour and calls for a little gluten flour to take up the slack. Gluten flour, available in health food stores, is simply the gluten from wheat. If you can find bread flour, by all means use it in place of the other flours.

### Ancient sourdoughs

Yeast is the other essential ingredient in bread. Millions of microscopic yeast plants feed on the sugars and starches in the dough and breathe out carbon dioxide, causing the bread to expand.

Surprisingly, you don't have to add yeast to bread dough to find it in the end product. The oldest kind of leavened bread is



sourdough, in which the dough, or part of it, is allowed to sit around till wild yeasts and bacteria from the air come and breed there. The yeast does the raising; the bacteria produce the acid that gives the characteristic sour taste.

Explorers and pioneers, who

**Oh, no! See what happens when you don't follow the directions? It's the dough that took over the world! Really, though, with the recipes below, bread making is easy!**

had no ready sources of yeast, baked this kind of bread; one pioneer who already had a good yeast culture or "starter" going, might share it with another. Even today, Alaskan old-timers are called sourdoughs.

Sourdough also seems to be the kind of bread the ancient Israelites were accustomed to baking more than 3,000 years ago, at the time they were leaving Egypt to settle in Canaan.

### You knead it

Now we come to the actual hands-in process of bread making. After you have mixed the flour, yeast, warm liquid and other ingredients (commonly salt, sugar or honey and oil), you come to the fun part — kneading.

Many people who bake bread say kneading is a wonderful outlet for tension — they put all that excess energy into their little ball of dough. Others like kneading because it is so rhythmic — they put on good dance music and do the "doughboy"!

To knead, place your sticky mass of dough on a lightly floured table or counter top.

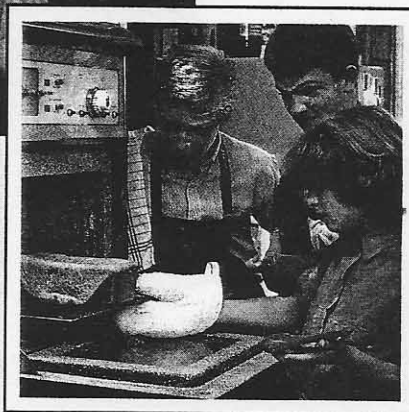
You'll want a little extra flour pushed off to the side somewhere, to keep adding little by little until the dough no longer feels sticky. Because flours differ in moisture content, most recipes specify a minimum amount of flour and assume you'll knead in any extra as needed.

Flatten the dough into a thick disk, fold it in half and lean on the dough with the heel of your hand to flatten it. Now give the dough a quarter turn and repeat the folding and flattening. Now





**Given the right conditions, a single yeast spore could cover the earth in a few days. In making bread, you should not let that happen!**



you're kneading! When you get into the rhythm, you'll be able to do a knead and turn a second.

Most doughs profit from 10 minutes' kneading. During that time, your soft, sticky dough will become smooth and elastic. You'll feel the gluten in the wheat developing as the dough becomes harder to push.

By the end of 10 minutes, you'll want a rest. Fortunately, your bread will too. Rinse out the bowl you mixed the dough in and lightly oil the inside. Place your dough in the bowl and coat it with oil all over. Cover the bowl with oiled plastic wrap or a clean, damp tea towel.

Now you need to do a little detective work. What the yeast wants is a very warm place; about 110 degrees Fahrenheit (43 Celsius) is ideal. In summer, just put the bowl in a safe place outdoors in the sun. Otherwise, try a sunny windowsill, near a fireplace or inside a gas oven with the pilot light on. Or heat an electric oven to 100 degrees Fahrenheit (40 Cel-

sus) and turn it off.

The growth of most living things takes time. You don't come home from school one day to find that your little sister has doubled in height. But come back to your dough in 40 minutes or so and you will find it has doubled in bulk. (It could take a little longer if it's in a coolish spot.

Recipes that call for less yeast than the accompanying one

- 2 cups (250 grams) whole wheat all-purpose flour
- ½ cup + 2 tablespoons (75 grams) white all-purpose flour
- ½ cup (50 grams) gluten flour (if you can find bread flour, use it in place of all three of these types of flour)
- 1¼ teaspoons salt
- 1 tablespoon active dried yeast
- 1 tablespoon honey
- 1 tablespoon cooking oil
- ½ cup (125 milliliters) boiling water
- ½ cup (150 milliliters) cold water

1. Mix the dry ingredients, including yeast, in a large bowl. Mix together honey, oil and boiling water; add cold water. Mix with dry ingredients till most of the flour sticks together.

2. Turn dough onto lightly floured surface;

could take a couple of hours.)

Maybe you have heard that, given the right conditions, a single yeast spore could cover the earth in a couple of days. When you see how much bread dough rises in an hour, you might believe it. But don't forget the gluten; if it has to stretch too far it can break, and your bread will fall, never to rise again. That's why recipes tell you to punch down the dough when it has doubled. The first rising was just to

stretch the gluten.

For the second rising, in the bread pans, stop the dough before it rises double, remembering that it will rise a little more in the heat of the oven before the yeast finally dies.

While the bread is baking, contemplate your

next loaf. For a few different recipes, look no further than the nearest general cookbook. Or check out your library for a book devoted exclusively to breads.

When the loaves emerge from the oven, stand back and admire your creations for a moment. But prepare for an onslaught of restless natives wielding butter knives. You've been tormenting them with fresh bread smells for some time, and they will have their revenge! □

### Easy Whole Wheat BREAD

knead 10 minutes. Place in large lightly oiled bowl, turning dough over to see that all surfaces are oiled. Cover with greased plastic film or a clean, damp tea towel. Leave in a warm place till dough doubles in size.

3. Press down risen dough and knead again one minute. Oil one 9x4x3 inch (23x10x8 centimeter) or two 6x4x3 inch (15x10x8 centimeter) loaf pans and place dough in them. Or, oil a cookie sheet (oven slide), form dough into a loaf shape and place it on sheet. Brush tops with warm water or oil. Cover and let rise again in warm place till not quite double.

4. Carefully uncover loaves and bake in a preheated 450 degree Fahrenheit (230 Celsius) oven for 25 to 35 minutes, till golden brown, but not burned. Remove from pans immediately and cool on a wire rack. □