

# Bread Making

Background information on making bread loaves and buns using yeast.

Not covered:

- Flat breads
- Hearth breads
- Sourdough breads
- Gingerbreads

## Notes

The transformation of flour into bread seems magical and the quality of the end result of DIY breadmaking is a bread of a flavour which is superior to almost every bought loaf. The **FAIR-TRADE COOKBOOK** recipes use only "elbow grease", there are no bread machine recipes, and no special equipment. We use only high quality ingredients, Fairtrade Palestinian oil, Doves Farm organic flours, Traidcraft Fair Trade / Fairtrade sugar.

As with many craft skills, producing a passable result can be achieved by following instructions, and we urge you to "have a go".

Whilst the consistent production of superior products requires knowledge, practice, and skill, all you need for your first loaf is a good recipe. The Fairtrade Cookbook website contains tried and trusted recipes using as many Fairtrade ingredients as possible. But not every recipe has been published, the product of one of our trials was even declined by the sparrows!

## Flours

Use the best flour you can afford.

We use Doves Farm organic flour, mainly from the following list:

- Strong white bread flour
- Malthouse bread flour
- Wholemeal bread flour
- Rye flour
- Spelt

## Yeast

When we started making bread, all we had was Allinsons dried yeast. It still works perfectly well for us.

Yeast can be mixed in with the flour and it will begin to ferment once warm water has been added. However, our preferred technique is to start the yeast in the warm water with a little sugar (**FAIRTRADE** of course) before adding the yeasty water to the flour. This achieves a faster first rise.

## Warm Water

A finger is an adequate thermometer.

If the water feels cool, it's too cold.

If the water feels nicely warm, then it is just right.

If it feels as hot as you would use to wash your hands, it's too hot.

## Proportions of ingredients

The following (scaleable) ratios work well:

- 500 gm flour
- 300 ml water
- 2 tsp (10gm) dried yeast
- 2 tsp (10gm) sugar (optional)
- 1 tsp (5 gm) salt
- 15 ml olive oil

300 ml water works well for a 50 - 50 dough white / wholemeal, more wholemeal flour takes more water, the tolerance is about 25 ml either way.

The optional sugar in the water boosts the yeast.

## Rise and Shine

Many recipes say: "Place the dough in a warm place and allow to rise". Yeast is most happily active in a temperature between 25 and 30 degrees C. Any hotter and the yeast dies, any cooler and the yeast is sleepy.

So look for a spot in the kitchen that would be a touch too warm for a person, that's where you put your dough to rise.

## Kneading

Kneading: on a lightly floured work surface:

- Push the centre of the dough away from you using the heel of your wrists
- Pull the far edge of the dough back over
- Rotate through 90 degrees and repeat.
- Continue pushing, pulling and turning until the dough is springy and elastic.

Knead only as much as you need to (sorry). Gluten will form and yeast will ferment and bread will be made whether or not you knead your dough. However, a little kneading gives a better consistency to the dough. When it feels springy and lively and you can smell the yeast at work, put the dough to rise and make some more **FAIR-TRADE** coffee.

## Punch Down

"Punching down" is the process of taking excess air out of a risen dough. There is no need to be aggressive with the dough, just turn it out onto a work surface and press down with fingers.

## Prove

"Proving" is to let the dough rise again after "punching down". The doubling of volume on the second and subsequent rises is quicker than on the first rise. ("Prove" = proves the yeast is still alive). A dough can be baked into bread anytime, but an aerated bread (unlike pitta) is generally baked after rising. Allowing dough to rise more than once doesn't make it lighter, but it does improve the flavour.

## Decorating

The easiest way to decorate a loaf is to scramble an egg and then (using a pastry brush), to brush the top of the loaf with the egg liquid. Once brushed either leave as is which produces a nice shiny finish, or sprinkle with seeds of your choice. Tiny black poppy seeds are very popular, but oat flakes and sesame seeds also work well.

## Slashing

Using a serrated edge knife, gently make 2 or 3, 1 cm deep cuts into the top of the dough just before baking. This releases the tension in the gluten and enables a lighter bread to be produced.

## Baking

A risen dough can be turned into bread, either in a bread tin, or on a baking sheet.

## Loaves

For a 450 gm loaf Gas Mark 6 for 40 minutes will be fine for brown bread, and in our experience will produce bread of excellent flavour using the flours mentioned.

However, a lighter loaf can be achieved by **slashing**<sup>1</sup> and **steaming**<sup>2</sup> and baking for 10 minutes

<sup>1</sup>[http://www.fairtradecookbook.org.uk/recipes/bread\\_making.htm#slashing](http://www.fairtradecookbook.org.uk/recipes/bread_making.htm#slashing)

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.fairtradecookbook.org.uk/recipes/bread\\_making.htm#steaming](http://www.fairtradecookbook.org.uk/recipes/bread_making.htm#steaming)

at Gas Mark 8, followed by 20 minutes at Gas Mark 6.

White bread loaves need a little less time.

## Bread Rolls

Use about 100 g of dough per bread roll.

Bake at Gas Mark 9 for 10 minutes and then Gas Mark 6 for 10 minutes, with steam if possible.

## Steaming

Putting a tray of just boiled water in the bottom of the oven just after the dough is inserted makes the bread more moist.

## Bottom Tapping

To check the progress of a loaf being baked, take it out of the bread tin, or off the baking sheet and tap the bottom. If it sounds hollow the bread is nearly finished. If the bread is also of a suitable colour (golden to brown) then it is ready for cooling.

## Cooling

Once baked, take the bread out of the oven and allow to cool on a wire rack, or in some manner to promote airflow. The bread is still changing whilst hot and the crust is retaining steam, so if possible, refrain from slicing until warm or until at room temperature.

(OK. Confession time. It is possible to become desperately hungry with the aromas of baking and we have been known to consume most of a loaf, in slices, liberally spread with butter and jam, and whilst still almost too hot to touch).

## Equipment

You will need:

- A large mixing bowl

- A measuring jug
- A set of scales
- Spoons
- A hard work surface
- A baking tray and / or bread tins
- A wire cooling rack

A baking tray is necessary for bread rolls and can be used for loaves.

## Books etc.

Nigella Lawson helped us get going with "How to be a Domestic Goddess".

Dan Lepard inspired us with his "How to Bake" column in the Saturday Guardian.

Daniel Stevens took us further with "Bread", a lovely expose of the craft of making bread.