

KETTLE BREAD

This is very easy and very unique bread. It's as close as I have come to replicating "Artisan Bread" in a normal kitchen. This bread has a wonderful texture, a crispy and chewy crust, and an amazing taste that makes you wonder if a little bit of wine was a part of the recipe (it's not...it's a part of the yeast's fermentation process).

One of the most amazing things about this bread is that it requires no kneading. None. That's because the dough is incredibly moist, almost a batter, and that allows the gluten molecules in the flour to align themselves without too much effort if given enough time. The better the molecules are aligned, the better the structure (crust/crumb/texture) will be. Kneading does the same thing, but this dough is so moist you really can't knead it. The down side is that although this is easy, it takes time, like at least 18 - 24 hours for best results, so plan ahead. Your forethought and lack of effort will be amply rewarded!

If you, like me, have a difficult time thinking 18-24 hours in advance, go to the end of the recipe to find out how to speed up the process to 6 hours or so. It will still be great bread, but if you have the time, the extra time fermenting/rising makes a noticeable difference in the depth of flavor.

INGREDIENTS:

3 Cups Flour (bread flour is best but not required) plus more for dusting
¼ teaspoon Yeast
1 ½ teaspoons Salt
1 5/8 Cup Water
¼ Cup (about) Flour Cornmeal or Wheat Bran as needed

DIRECTIONS:

In a large bowl, combine flour, yeast, and salt. Add water and stir until blended. The dough will be shaggy and sticky. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let it rest for 12 to 18 hours at warm room temperature (about 70 degrees) or until the surface is dotted with bubbles.

After the dough has risen, lightly flour your work surface, place the dough on it, and sprinkle the dough with a little more flour. Fold the dough over on itself once or twice. Cover loosely with plastic wrap and let rise for 15 minutes.

Using just enough flour to keep the dough from sticking to the work surface or to your fingers, gently and quickly shape the dough into a ball. Generously coat a cotton towel (not terry cloth) with flour, wheat bran, or corn meal. Put dough, seam side down, on towel. Dust with flour/bran/cornmeal. Cover with another cotton towel and let rise for 2 hours or until the dough is more than double in size and will not readily spring back when poked with a finger.

At least 30 minutes before the dough is ready, heat your oven to 450 degrees. Put a 6 to 8 quart heavy covered pot (cast iron/ enamel/ceramic/Pyrex) in the oven as it heats.

When the dough is ready, carefully remove the pot from the oven. Slide your hand under the towel and turn the dough over into the pot, seam side up. It may look like a mess but that's OK. Really! Shake the pot once or twice to evenly distribute the dough: it'll straighten itself out as it bakes. Cover the pot with a lid and bake for 25 minutes. Reduce heat to 350 degrees and continue to bake uncovered, and cook for 10 minutes. Take the temperature, and it should be at least 190 degrees but no more than 205 degrees when done.

Cool on rack.

FOR GARLIC BREAD:

If you would like to make an amazing garlic bread, roast 2 heads of garlic. Allow them to cool, remove the cloves to a bowl, and mash with a fork (as finely or coarsely as you desire). Place the garlic in your bread mixing bowl, and follow the directions above! (By the way, this makes a spectacular grilled cheese sandwich!)

TO SPEED THINGS UP:

Use ½ Tablespoon of yeast in the dough. Follow the recipe, and allow to rise until at least double in size. If you can wait longer, great! Follow the rest of the recipe as published.