

Bread Making Made Easy



DIANE DEVEREAUX

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Bread Making Made Easy

Introduction

Few things in life are as comforting as the aroma of freshly baked bread wafting through the kitchen. It's a scent that has nourished humankind for millennia and one that still has the power to stop us in our tracks. Bread may look humble—the combination of flour, water, yeast, and salt. But behind those simple ingredients lies a craft connecting us to history, tradition, and the joy of sharing wholesome food with the people we love.

This eBook is designed to give you everything you “knead” to know (pun absolutely intended!) to start your own journey into bread making. Whether you've never baked a loaf or you've dabbled with dough but want more confidence, you'll find simple techniques, handy tips, and

a few recipes proving bread making doesn't have to be complicated to be delicious. Think of this as your friendly companion in the kitchen: encouraging, forgiving, and full of practical wisdom.

And here's the best part: this eBook is just the beginning. *Bread Making Made Easy* is a taste of my larger work, the book *From Seed to Table*, where we'll explore growing, harvesting, preserving, and preparing food that nourishes both body and soul. So as you mix ingredients, let dough rise, and bake these hearty loaves, know you're joining a journey that goes far beyond the kitchen counter. It starts in the soil and ends at the table, with plenty of delicious stops along the way.

A Satisfying Slice of History

Bread is one of humanity's oldest prepared foods, and every loaf you bake carries with it thousands of years of tradition. The very first breads were likely happy accidents: ground grains mixed with water and cooked on hot stones or in the ashes of a fire. These early flatbreads were simple, nourishing, and portable, which was perfect for nomadic life. Archaeologists have found evidence of bread-like foods dating back more than 14,000 years, even before the invention of farming.

The real magic happened when wild yeasts (the dusty white coating on fruit skin or cereal grains) joined the party. At some point, dough left out in the air began to bubble and rise on its own, creating the first leavened

breads. Ancient Egyptians are often credited with refining this process around 4,000 BC, building ovens and developing methods that made bread a staple of daily life. In fact, bread was so central to Egyptian culture that workers on the pyramids were often paid in loaves and beer.

As bread spread across cultures, it became more than food. It became symbolic. In medieval Europe, bread was a marker of class: white, finely milled loaves for the wealthy, coarse whole grain for the poor. In religious traditions, bread has long carried deep meaning, from Jewish challah to Christian communion. And in more practical terms, bread has always been a unifier, a staple shared around the table, broken between friends, and used to nourish communities.

**EVERYTHING
YOU “KNEAD” TO
KNOW ABOUT
MAKING HEARTY,
WHOLESOME
CREATIONS**

Simple Bread Making Techniques

Bread making is a timeless and rewarding skill that connects us to the traditions of home baking and the satisfaction of creating nourishing food from just a handful of ingredients. While the art of bread making can be as intricate or as straightforward as you choose, it begins with mastering a few foundational techniques. These simple, reliable methods will empower you to incorporate bread making into your seasonal pantry and daily routine without overwhelming your schedule.

At its heart, bread making is about embracing the process. It's about understanding the rhythm of mixing, kneading, proofing, and baking while recognizing bread

is a living creation. Each loaf is influenced by the temperature in your kitchen, the quality of your ingredients, and even the humidity in the air. These variables might feel daunting at first, but they're part of the beauty of bread making.

While entire books are devoted to bread making, I want to give you simple, easy techniques I regularly use in my home. These techniques not only provide a solid foundation to start your home bread-making journey, but you can expand upon them to create perfect artisan loaves. But for now, let's harness the basics so you can incorporate this time-honored art into your everyday life.

Bread Dough Basics: Kneading, Proofing, and Shaping

The foundation of great bread begins with understanding the basics of working with dough. While recipes may vary, the process of kneading, proofing, and shaping remains essential to achieving a successful loaf. These steps transform a simple mixture of flour, water, yeast, and salt into the airy, flavorful bread we love.

KNEADING is the first critical step. It develops gluten, the network of proteins that gives bread its structure and chew. After mixing your ingredients into a shaggy dough, begin kneading by folding the dough over itself and pressing it down with the heels of your hands. Rotate the dough slightly and repeat, creating a rhythmic motion. This

process stretches the gluten strands, making the dough smooth and elastic.

Depending on the recipe, kneading by hand can take anywhere from 8 to 12 minutes. To check if your dough is ready, perform the "windowpane test": Stretch a small piece of dough between your fingers. If it forms a thin, translucent sheet without tearing, you've developed enough gluten.

PROOFING is the next step, where the dough is left to rest and rise. During this time, yeast consumes the sugars in the flour and releases carbon dioxide, causing the dough to expand. For the first proof (often called *bulk*

fermentation), place the kneaded dough in a lightly oiled bowl, cover it with a damp cloth or plastic wrap, and let it rise in a warm, draft-free area. The dough should double in size, which typically takes one to two hours depending on the temperature and the amount of yeast used.

Proper proofing is crucial for flavor development and structure. If we use too much yeast, our dough will rise quickly, but with less flavor development and a stronger yeast taste. If we use less yeast and give the dough ample time to proof (rise), the longer fermentation will develop better flavor. To test if the dough has risen enough, gently press your finger into it. If the indentation springs back slowly, it's ready; if it bounces back quickly, it needs more time.

SHAPING comes after the dough has risen and been gently deflated. This step determines the final shape and texture of your bread. Start by turning the dough out onto

a lightly floured surface and pressing it into a flat rectangle to remove any large air bubbles. Then fold and roll the dough into your desired shape, whether it's a boule (round ball), a bâtard (oblong shape), or a sandwich loaf. Pay attention to creating surface tension by pulling the dough taut across the top and sealing the seams underneath. This tension helps the bread hold its shape as it rises and bakes.

Once shaped, the dough undergoes a second proof, often shorter than the first, allowing it to relax and rise again before baking.

By mastering these three essential steps, you'll have the skills to create a wide variety of breads. Each step is an opportunity to connect with the dough, adjust to its unique characteristics, and refine your technique over time. With practice, kneading, proofing, and shaping will become second nature, paving the way for endless bread-making possibilities.

Understanding Yeast: Active Dry Versus Instant

Yeast is the cornerstone of bread making, a living organism playing a vital role in transforming simple ingredients into a flavorful, airy loaf. At its core, yeast is a type of fungus that feeds on the sugars present in flour and converts them into carbon dioxide and alcohol through fermentation. This process is what makes bread rise, as the carbon dioxide gets trapped in the dough, creating bubbles that expand and give the bread its light, airy texture. The alcohol, though it evaporates during baking, contributes to the rich and complex flavors that develop in the bread.

Yeast is highly sensitive to its environment, thriving in warmth and moisture. Too much heat, however, can kill it, while too little can slow its activity, leading to a dense or under-risen loaf. This is why many bread recipes specify lukewarm water for activating yeast, ensuring it wakes up and starts fermenting efficiently. For recipes that use active dry yeast or instant yeast, understanding how to measure and incorporate it properly is essential. Active

dry yeast often requires dissolving in water first, while instant yeast can be mixed directly into the flour.

Yeast is not just about leavening; it's also about flavor. During fermentation, yeast produces organic acids and enzymes that interact with the flour and other ingredients, creating the nuanced taste and aroma associated with homemade bread. A slow fermentation process, such as allowing the dough to rise in a cool environment or overnight, can further enhance these flavors, giving your bread a depth difficult to achieve with commercial loaves.

Bread yeast comes in two common forms, and both can be used successfully in all the recipes in this book. The main difference lies in how you add them to your dough.

ACTIVE DRY YEAST comes in coarse granules and needs to be dissolved in lukewarm water with a pinch of sugar

before it's added to flour. This step ensures the yeast is alive and active. Because active dry yeast wakes up a little more slowly, doughs made with it may take slightly longer to rise, which can actually develop a more complex flavor.

INSTANT YEAST, or rapid-rise or bread-machine yeast, is ground into finer particles. It can be added directly to the flour without dissolving it in water, which makes it a bit quicker and more convenient to use. Instant yeast often gives a slightly faster rise, but it also works beautifully for long, slow fermentation.

When it comes to substitution, the rule is simple: You can swap instant and active dry yeast in any recipe at a 1:1 ratio. The only adjustment is in how you use them:

If you're using instant yeast in place of active dry, simply add it with the dry ingredients instead of first dissolving it in water.

If you're using active dry yeast in place of instant, dissolve it in warm water before proceeding.

So don't stress over which yeast you have in your pantry. Both will give you beautiful loaves.

How to Make Lukewarm Water

Follow these three quick steps to create lukewarm water.

1. Mix equal parts of boiling water and cold water in a bowl or cup.
2. Use your wrist or a kitchen thermometer to test the temperature. Lukewarm water should feel neutral or read around 100 to 110°F or 37 to 43°C.
3. Add more hot or cold water until the desired temperature is reached.

Choosing the Right Oil for Baking Bread

Just as flour and yeast shape the character of your bread, the type of fat you choose can make a surprising difference in both flavor and nutrition. Traditional recipes often call for vegetable oil or canola oil simply because when the recipes were created, those oils were inexpensive and widely available. But today, with so much research pointing to healthier alternatives, bakers have more options than ever to enrich their dough while nourishing their bodies.

The important role oil plays in bread making lies in the bread's tenderness, extension of freshness, and enhancement of flavor. As you try various oils over time, you'll learn how to confidently choose the option that suits your kitchen and your values. With a simple swap, your bread can be both delicious and aligned with a healthier lifestyle.

EXTRA-VIRGIN OLIVE OIL is one of the most beloved choices, especially for Mediterranean breads. It lends a subtle, fruity flavor, while lighter varieties give tenderness without much taste. Either way, it keeps the crumb soft and adds a touch of richness.

AVOCADO OIL is another excellent option. It's neutral in flavor and packed with healthy fats. It's also very stable at high baking temperatures. And it works beautifully in everyday sandwich loaves, tender rolls, and even quick bread, like banana or zucchini.

COLD-PRESSED, UNREFINED GRAPESEED OIL is another neutral-flavored oil perfect for baking given its high smoke point. It won't add noticeable flavor to your bread and is often used in sandwich loaves, focaccia, and

enriched rolls. Grapeseed oil is the perfect stand-in when a traditional recipe calls for canola or vegetable oil.

UNREFINED, OR VIRGIN, COCONUT OIL adds a light, subtle coconut aroma and a slight sweetness to your bread. It's great for softer sandwich loaves, sweet breads, and dinner rolls. Refined coconut oil has a more neutral flavor with no coconut taste, but it still gives the bread the same tenderizing effect. Because coconut oil solidifies at cooler temperatures, it gives the dough a bit of structure similar to butter. When using it for baking, however, be sure to melt the coconut oil, then let it cool slightly before mixing it into the dough.

Beyond oils, many bakers are rediscovering using traditional animal fats. Lard, once commonplace in the

home, produces loaves with a remarkable tender crumb and mild flavor. Beef tallow adds depth and a savory richness to rustic whole-grain breads, like rye and farmhouse-style loaves, keeping the bread moist. Clarified butter, or ghee, has been used for centuries, bringing a nutty, almost caramelized note to the bread, along with a higher smoke point that makes it excellent for baking.

Last, butter plays an intricate role in bread making. It's how we incorporate butter into the dough, however, that makes all the difference. Melted butter added to the dough mixes evenly, tenderizes the crumb, and adds flavor. This is common in enriched breads like brioche. In contrast, adding cold butter cut into small pieces creates tiny pockets of fat within the dough. This technique is used when baking biscuits, scones, piecrusts, puff pastry, and some flatbreads.

Dough-Freezing Tips

Freezing bread dough is a convenient way to enjoy freshly baked bread on demand. It saves time and gives you the flexibility to bake fresh bread whenever you need it. Properly frozen dough will last upwards of three months in the freezer without diminishing quality and rise. Follow these simple tips for freezing and thawing your dough to later bake into delicious, fresh bread.

- Allow the dough to complete its first proof prior to freezing so it's ready to bake once thawed.
- Lightly coat the dough with olive or avocado oil before wrapping to prevent it from sticking to the wrap or freezer bag.
- Use plastic wrap, parchment or baking paper, or beeswax wraps to wrap the dough tightly. Then place the dough in a freezer-safe bag or airtight container. Double-wrapping helps prevent freezer burn and preserves flavor.
- For pizza or flatbread dough, flatten it slightly before freezing to save space and make it thaw quicker.
- Clearly label the bag with the type of dough and the freezing date.
- When ready to use it, thaw the dough in the refrigerator overnight or for several hours, keeping it wrapped to prevent its drying out.
- Once it's thawed, let the dough rise at room temperature for 30 to 60 minutes. Then before baking, place the dough in a warm, draft-free area to rise until it's doubled in size.

EASY BREAD MAKING RECIPES

NO-KNEAD PEASANT BREAD: A HUMBLE AND HISTORIC FAVORITE

When I first ventured into bread making, I ambitiously dived straight into sourdough. My aunt Maggie gifted me a starter, and though a bit intimidated, I eagerly tended to it, feeding it diligently and feeling a deep connection to the process. Everything was going wonderfully—until I went on vacation. Upon my return, I discovered my beloved starter had died, and with that, my enthusiasm took a hit. Frustrated and unprepared, I found myself in a bind because I still needed to bake bread for my family.

That's when I turned to a humble and trusted no-knead bread recipe, and in doing so, I rediscovered the joy of simplicity. Peasant bread was my saving grace—easy, forgiving, and quick to prepare. It should have been my first foray into bread making, a perfect entry point when

I indeed felt intimidated by the seemingly intricate processes of kneading and extended proofing. Peasant bread's charm lies in its straightforwardness. With just a handful of ingredients and minimal effort, it yields a rustic loaf with a crusty exterior and soft, tender crumb.

Peasant bread was a staple among European peasants, made with basic ingredients such as whole wheat or rye flour, water, yeast, and salt. These essentials were accessible even in times of scarcity. This bread, then, not only nourished families with its hearty texture and versatility, but served as the foundation of meals in communities where resources were limited. Its enduring appeal lies in its ability to bring satisfying comfort to the table, no matter the occasion.

Common Peasant Bread Recipe

The recipe for peasant bread remains timeless, not just for its history but for its practicality. It's perfect for beginners and seasoned bakers alike. Whether you're serving it alongside soups and stews, slicing it for sandwiches, or simply enjoying it warm with butter, peasant bread is a reminder that sometimes the simplest recipes are the most rewarding.

INGREDIENTS

5 cups (480 g) all-purpose flour or bread flour
1 T. (12 g) kosher salt
1 T. (12 g) sugar
1 T. (12 g) instant yeast
3½ cups (840 mL) lukewarm water
Softened butter for greasing

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the flour, salt, sugar, and instant yeast.
2. Pour in the lukewarm water and mix with a wooden spoon or spatula until a sticky dough forms and all the flour is incorporated.
3. Cover the bowl with a clean dishtowel or plastic wrap. Let the dough rise in a warm, draft-free area for 2 hours, or until it's doubled in size.
4. Place two 1-quart (approximately 1-liter) oven-safe bowls or a Dutch oven in the oven. Preheat the oven to 425°F (218°C) for at least 30 minutes.
5. Once the dough has risen, use two forks to gently deflate it by pulling it away from the sides of the bowl.

6. Divide the dough into two equal portions. If using a Dutch oven, there is no need to divide into equal portions.
7. Carefully remove the preheated oven-safe bowls from the oven, grease them with softened butter, and place each portion of dough into the prepared baking vessels.
8. Cover the dough loosely with a dishtowel and let it rise for about 20 to 30 minutes, or until it reaches the rim of the bowls.
9. Place the bowls or Dutch oven in the preheated oven. Bake for 15 minutes at 425°F (218°C). Then reduce the oven temperature to 375°F (190°C) and continue baking for an additional 15 to 20 minutes, or until the loaves are golden brown and sound hollow when tapped.
10. Remove the bread from the oven and let it cool in the bowls for about 10 minutes, then transfer the loaves to a wire rack to completely cool before slicing.

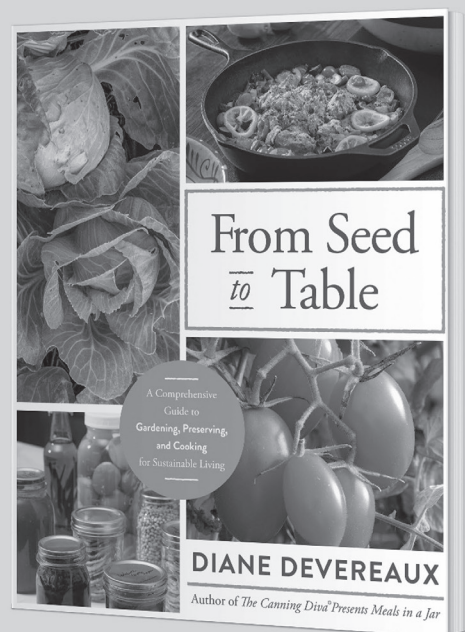
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CLASSIC COUNTRY WHITE BREAD

If peasant bread was the workhorse of the farm, then white country bread was the dream of the everyday home baker once milling technology improved. For centuries, finely sifted flour was a luxury reserved for the wealthy, while the working classes ate coarse brown loaves. By the nineteenth century, however, improved milling made lighter flour more affordable, and soft, fluffy white loaves began to appear on more dining tables. This humble yet dignified bread quickly became a symbol of prosperity and comfort.

Today, this classic loaf is one of the most approachable breads for beginners. It teaches the essential rhythm of kneading and dough rising. Using simple ingredients, you'll produce a tender crumb inside and a

golden crust outside. The versatile bread is suitable for making sandwiches, hearty enough for toast, and comforting enough to stand alone with nothing more than a pat of butter.

When making this classic bread, be sure not to overwork your dough or the loaf will become too dense and heavy. Also, be sure to use lukewarm water (see tip on page xx) to avoid overheating the yeast, which will destroy it, preventing the loaf from rising. Last, be sure to let your dough rise in a warm, draft-free location resting in an oiled bowl. If you have a proofing feature on your oven, or a warm location in your home such as a cupboard above an appliance, be sure to cover the bowl with a dishtowel to keep it free from pests and dust.

Classic Country White Bread Recipe (Beginner's Kneaded Loaf)

This kneaded white bread can be your daily go-to loaf. Its interior crumb is soft and fluffy with a golden crust. What I like most about this recipe is it teaches beginners the rhythm of kneading bread by hand and patience while the dough rises. This recipe will create two generous loaves that fill a 9 × 5 pan beautifully, or four smaller, 8 × 4 loaves.

INGREDIENTS

2½ cups (560 mL) lukewarm water
1¾ T. (18 g) active dry yeast
¾ cup + 2 tsp. (160 g) white granulated sugar
1¾ tsp. (9 g) salt
2 eggs, beaten
Scant ⅓ cup (75 mL) oil
7 cups (875 to 900 g) bread flour (plus extra for dusting)
Softened butter for greasing the loaf pans

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat the oven to 375°F (190°C).
2. In a large mixing bowl, combine the lukewarm water, active dry yeast, and two pinches of sugar. Stir gently, then let sit for about 5 minutes, or until the mixture looks foamy and bubbly on top. This means your yeast is alive and ready.
3. Stir in the remaining sugar, salt, beaten eggs, and oil. Add half of the flour and beat by hand until the mixture is smooth and stretchy, almost like thick cake batter. Slowly add the rest of the flour, one cup at a time, until a shaggy dough comes together and begins to pull away from the sides of the bowl.
4. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured countertop. Knead by hand for about 8 minutes, folding the dough over itself, pressing with the heels of your

- hands, and rotating as you go. The dough should start out a little sticky but become smooth, elastic, and slightly springy to the touch. A good sign it's ready: Press a fingertip gently into the dough, and the indent will slowly bounce back.
5. Lightly grease a clean bowl with oil. Place the kneaded dough inside, turning it once so the surface is lightly coated. Cover with a damp cloth or plastic wrap and let rise in a warm, draft-free spot until doubled in size, at least 1 hour. The dough will look puffy and airy, and if you gently press a finger into it, the indent will stay.
 6. Once the dough has doubled in size, take two forks and gently pull it away from the sides of the bowl, deflating it. Use the forks to divide the dough into two equal portions (or four if baking in the smaller, 8 × 4 pans).
 7. Transfer each portion into a greased loaf pan lightly dusted with flour. Smooth the tops with lightly oiled fingers if needed. Cover again and let rise until the dough crowns about 1 inch above the rims of the pans, 30 to 45 minutes.
 8. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes or until the tops are deep golden brown. To test for doneness, carefully tip one loaf out of the pan and tap its bottom. If it sounds hollow, the bread is baked through. Remove the bread from the pans and cool on a wire rack.

RECIPE TIP: For a softer crust, brush the tops of each loaf with melted butter while still warm. For a crisper crust, completely cool the loaf on a wire rack without covering.

Fun Bite-Size Facts

- The word *companion* comes from the Latin *com panis*, meaning “with bread.”
- In medieval times, bread trenches (called *trenchers*) doubled as plates, soaking up the meal before eaten or fed to animals.
- The world’s largest loaf of bread was recorded in Brazil in 2008, weighing more than 1,500 pounds!
- In World War I, soldiers often called bread “the staff of life.” Loaves were rationed carefully, often stretched with potato or even sawdust to make supplies last.
- The phrase “the best thing since sliced bread” is only about 100 years old. Commercial sliced bread was first sold in 1928, and it was advertised as “the greatest forward step in baking since bread was wrapped.”

ANCIENT FLATBREAD: FOCACCIA

Focaccia is one of Italy's oldest breads, with origins stretching back to Roman times. Its name comes from the Latin *focus*, meaning “hearth,” because it was originally baked on the hot stones of an open fire. Over centuries, this simple flatbread became a staple across the Mediterranean, cherished for its golden crust, tender crumb, and ability to soak up the very best olive oil. In many Italian towns, you'll find a version of focaccia unique to the region, sometimes plain and salted, sometimes topped with olives, onions, or herbs.

The big difference with focaccia bread making is its slow, cold fermentation process. Unlike other breads, focaccia requires a 24-hour, upwards of a 72-hour, rise

in the refrigerator. Doing so develops incredible flavor and texture, making the recipe feel more artisanal and approachable. While I'll instruct you to let it rise for 24 hours, feel free to leave it in cold storage longer prior to baking.

One of my favorite joys in making focaccia bread is creating new flavor adaptations to suit my mood and taste buds. Feel free to adorn your dough with fresh rosemary, caramelized onions, olives, roasted garlic—the possibilities are endless. Think of focaccia as a delicious blank canvas waiting for you to decorate it with seasonal herbs and vegetables. Have fun!

Focaccia with Sun-Dried Tomatoes and Fresh Herbs

What makes focaccia so beloved today is its versatility. It's both rustic and elegant, equally at home alongside a bowl of soup, as the base of a sandwich, or torn into pieces for dipping. The sun-dried tomatoes, basil, and thyme in this recipe add bursts of flavor that complement the fruity richness of extra virgin olive oil. Create this flatbread in a 9 × 13 dish or in two smaller rounds.

INGREDIENTS

2 cups (480 mL) warm water
2¼ tsp. (7 g) active dry yeast
1 tsp. (4 g) sugar or honey
5 cups (625 g) bread flour (plus extra for dusting)
2 tsp. (12 g) sea salt
¼ cup (60 mL) extra virgin olive oil (plus more for greasing and drizzling)
½ cup (60 g) sun-dried tomatoes, chopped
¼ cup (10 g) fresh basil leaves, chopped
6 individual sprigs fresh thyme
Coarse or Maldon sea salt for sprinkling

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a large mixing bowl, combine the warm water, yeast, and sugar or honey. Stir and let sit for 5 minutes, until the surface looks foamy.
2. Add the flour, salt, and ¼ cup olive oil. Stir with a wooden spoon or spatula until a shaggy dough forms. The dough will be sticky—that's exactly what you want.
3. Turn the dough onto a lightly floured surface and knead gently for 5 to 6 minutes, or until it becomes smooth and elastic. It should still feel a bit tacky but no longer stick heavily to your hands.
4. Transfer the dough to a large bowl greased with olive oil. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 24 hours. During this slow rise, the dough will double in size and develop a deep, complex flavor.

5. When ready to bake, remove the dough from the refrigerator. Generously grease a 9 × 13-inch pan (or two smaller pans) with olive oil. Transfer the dough to the greased pan and stretch it to its edges. Let it rest at room temperature for 30 to 45 minutes. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 425°F (220°C).
6. Use your fingertips to press deep dimples all over the surface of the risen dough. Drizzle with more olive oil, making sure some oil pools in the dimples. Evenly space the chopped sun-dried tomatoes, chopped basil, and thyme sprigs on the surface of the dough. Then sprinkle the sea salt.
7. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, until the focaccia is golden brown on top and crisp around the edges. At the 15-minute mark, tent foil over the focaccia to prevent the tomatoes from burning.
8. Let cool in the pan for 10 minutes before transferring to a wire rack. Slice into squares or wedges and serve warm or at room temperature.

SERVING TIP: For an authentic Mediterranean finish, drizzle the focaccia with a little more high-quality extra virgin olive oil just before serving. It adds shine, aroma, and the perfect finishing touch.

Understanding Staling: Why Bread Loses Its Freshness

Staling, also known as *retrogradation*, is the process by which bread loses its soft, fresh texture over time. It's a natural occurrence caused by changes in the structure of starch molecules within the bread. Refrigeration and exposure to air speed up staling because the water is trapped within the bread's structure but is no longer in a form that contributes to softness. Slow staling by storing your home-made bread in a bread box or wrapping it in breathable materials like cloth. Freeze for longer storage and reheat to refresh.

A HEARTY TRADITION: RUSTIC WHOLE-GRAIN BREADS

Rye bread has long been the backbone of rural diets in Northern and Eastern Europe, where wheat was scarce and the colder climate favored hardy rye grains. From the dense black breads of Russia to the tangy sourdough ryes of Scandinavia, these loaves were made to last and nourish hardworking families.

Historically, when butter or oils were unavailable or too precious, rendered animal fats like lard or beef tallow were often worked into dough. Not only did this use every part of the animal, but it also enriched the bread, keeping it moist and giving it a subtle, savory undertone. Not to mention, it helped keep the bread's longevity in colder climates.

The vessel you use to bake your rye bread can make all the difference in achieving that hearty, crackling crust and even bake. A 6-quart cast iron Dutch oven is one of the best choices; its heavy walls hold heat beautifully, and when the lid is on, it traps steam. That steam helps the

bread fully rise before the crust sets, giving you an artisan-style loaf with a chewy, caramelized exterior.

If you don't have a Dutch oven, a clay baker (like a cloche or Römertopf) is another excellent option. These mimic the effect of a wood-fired oven, surrounding the bread with moist heat that yields a rustic, blistered crust. A heavy ceramic or enameled casserole dish with a tight-fitting lid will also do the trick.

For you bakers without specialty equipment, don't worry. You can still succeed. Place your loaf on the middle rack of the oven. To create steam, add a small oven-safe pan with water on the lower rack, or mist the loaf with water just before baking. The key is capturing that burst of steam in the first few minutes, which allows the rye loaf to fully expand before the crust hardens.

A rustic rye loaf isn't about perfection; it's about tradition, nourishment, and a crusty round like it came straight from the hearth.

Rustic Rye Bread with Beef Tallow

This rustic rye loaf recipe brings tradition forward, blending whole-grain rye flour with bread flour for a balance of flavor and rise. The beef tallow adds tenderness and depth, complementing the rye's natural earthiness. The result is a hearty, dark-crust bread perfect for slicing thick and serving with soups, stews, or smears of butter. It's a loaf that feels as old as the hearth but right at home on a modern table. Makes one large round loaf.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 cups (480 mL) lukewarm water
- 2¼ tsp. (7 g) active dry yeast
- 1 T. (12 g) dark molasses or honey
- 2 cups (240 g) whole-grain rye flour
- 2½ cups (310 g) bread flour (plus extra for dusting)
- 2 tsp. (12 g) salt
- 3 T. (40 g) beef tallow, softened or gently melted (plus extra for greasing)
- 1 T. (10 g) caraway seeds (optional)

INSTRUCTIONS

1. In a large mixing bowl, combine the lukewarm water, yeast, and molasses or honey. Stir gently and let stand for 5 minutes, or until the surface looks foamy.
2. Add the rye flour, bread flour, salt, beef tallow, and caraway seeds (if using the latter). Stir until a rough, shaggy dough forms.
3. Turn the dough onto a lightly floured surface and knead for about 8 to 10 minutes. Rye dough will feel stickier and denser than wheat dough, which

is normal. Add small sprinkles of flour only if the dough is unmanageable. By the end of kneading, the dough should feel tacky but hold together, with some elasticity developing.

4. Place the dough in a lightly greased bowl, cover with a damp cloth or plastic wrap, and let rise in a warm place until doubled in size, about 1 to 1½ hours.
5. Gently shape the risen dough into a boule (round ball). Place on parchment paper and let rest for 30 minutes. Meanwhile, preheat your oven and the Dutch oven with its lid to 400°F (200°C) for 30

minutes. Then carefully remove the Dutch oven and its lid and place on a heat-safe area.

6. Gently lift the dough by the sides of the parchment paper and place it inside the hot Dutch oven. Using a sharp knife, slash the top of the loaf to allow expansion. Place the lid on the Dutch oven and bake for 30 minutes. Remove the lid and bake another 10 to 15 minutes, until the crust is deep brown.
7. Remove the loaf from the Dutch oven by the parchment paper and transfer to a wire rack to cool for at least 1 hour before slicing. Rye bread continues to set as it cools, so resist the urge to cut too soon.

INGREDIENT TIP: If you don't have beef tallow on hand, substitute the same amount of lard, ghee, or softened butter. Each brings its own character: lard for tenderness, ghee for a nutty richness, and butter for a hint of sweetness. Any of these fats may also be used to lightly grease the bowl before the dough rises.

Preserved Bread in a Tin

During World War I, “bread in a tin” kept loaves dry and edible, providing a practical shelf-stable solution for soldiers on the front lines: something that could survive the trenches—a ration loaf baked, cooled, and sealed inside a sturdy metal can. Once sterilized by heat exposure, the tins kept bread dry, mold-free, and edible for months, even in muddy, wet conditions.

It wasn't glamorous (and the bread certainly wasn't soft and fluffy), but it was a reliable way to deliver “the staff of life” to hungry doughboys on the front lines. In fact, the idea was so practical that preserved breads appeared in many armies' rations, and you can still find a descendant today: Boston brown bread in a can, a sweet rye loaf still sold in American grocery stores!

So how did it work? The process was a lot like modern canning. Loaves were baked until firm, then completely cooled before being packed into clean metal tins. Once sealed, the tins were heated again to destroy bacteria and mold, locking in freshness and making the bread safe for long-term storage. The result: a portable, battlefield-ready loaf that could last far longer than fresh bread ever could.

One of my most vivid memories is standing in the Smithsonian Institution with my mom and sister, looking at a tinned loaf of bread displayed alongside images of my grandfather's regiment and preserved uniforms behind protective glass. In that moment, bread wasn't just sustenance to me; it was a tangible link to family, sacrifice, and the everyday resilience of those who came before us. It's a memory I will always cherish.

Storing Homemade Bread: Tips for Freshness and Longevity

Homemade bread, free of preservatives, has a much shorter shelf life than store-bought varieties, but this is part of its charm. Its freshness and flavor are best enjoyed within the first couple of days. With the right storage techniques, however, you can extend its life or even freeze it for later use. Here are some practical tips to help you make the most of your homemade bread:

CONSUME QUICKLY. Homemade bread is at its peak within one to two days of baking. Plan to enjoy it fresh by pairing it with meals, using it for sandwiches, or toasting it for breakfast.

STORE AT ROOM TEMPERATURE. Store your bread at room temperature in a cool, dry place. Wrapping it in a clean cotton or linen cloth helps maintain the crust's texture while preventing it from drying out. Avoid plastic bags for crusty bread as they can trap moisture and make the crust soggy.

USE A BREAD BOX. A bread box provides a perfect environment for homemade loaves by keeping them at a stable temperature with proper air circulation, slowing staling.

FREEZE FOR LONGER STORAGE. Bread freezes exceptionally well. To freeze, let the loaf completely cool, then

wrap it tightly in plastic wrap or aluminum foil. Place the wrapped loaf in a freezer-safe bag, removing as much air as possible. Properly frozen, bread can be stored for up to three months.

THAW AND REHEAT. To thaw, remove the bread from the freezer and let it come to room temperature in its wrapping to prevent condensation. For a fresher taste, warm the thawed loaf in a 350°F (175°C) oven for 10 to 15 minutes.

SLICE BEFORE FREEZING. If you don't plan to use the whole loaf at once, slice it before freezing. This way, you can remove individual slices as needed, toasting or reheating them directly from their frozen state.

AVOID REFRIGERATION. While refrigeration may seem like a good idea, it can cause bread to stale faster due to the crystallization of starch molecules in cold temperatures.

By following these tips, you can make the most of your homemade bread, ensuring it stays fresh and delicious for as long as possible. Whether you savor it right away or freeze it for future enjoyment, your efforts in bread making will never go to waste.

From Bread to Table: Your Next Chapter

Bread making is a journey of hands, heart, and heritage. With just flour, water, yeast, and patience, you've seen how simple ingredients can transform into a food that's nourishing and deeply satisfying. Every loaf you bake connects you to traditions stretching back centuries, while giving you the joy of feeding those you love today.

This eBook and my book *From Seed to Table* both

celebrate the seasonality of food—how it's grown, preserved, and shared. My hope is these bread making recipes give you confidence to keep exploring, to keep expanding, and to see each loaf as one step in your own story of nourishment and creativity.

So preheat your oven, dust your counter with flour, and start baking! Because from seed to table, there's a world of flavor waiting for you.

Xo

Diane, The Canning Diva®

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

DIANE DEVEREAUX, THE CANNING DIVA®, is an internationally recognized food preservation expert, author, television presenter, instructor, and mother of two. Since 2012, Diane has been sharing her lifelong passion for canning and food preservation, translating 30 years of experience into practical solutions for the busy lives of families across the globe. She recently became a Floridian and is enjoying the splendors of sunshine and a longer growing season.

Diane earned her bachelor's degree in international business from Davenport University and later plunged into a career in disaster management, where she applied her knowledge of food preservation, survival, and sustainability to those in crisis. Her deep-rooted experience in home canning, combined with her background in preparedness, led her to create The Canning Diva®—a brand that blends her love of gardening and preserving with her commitment to self-reliance and practical education.

A staunch advocate for individuals' right to know what's in the food they eat, Diane proudly supports honest and transparent food labeling. This belief fuels her year-round dedication to gardening and preserving foods at home, ensuring a healthy lifestyle for herself and her loved ones. Her mission is to keep the time-honored traditions of food preservation and heritage food crafts alive and thriving, teaching these invaluable skills to households across the world through everything she creates, writes, and shares.

Connect with Diane:

Website: canningdiva.com

Facebook and Instagram: [@canningdiva](https://www.facebook.com/canningdiva)

YouTube: The Canning Diva

Pinterest: CanningDiva

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