

Real Russian Brown Bread

Vera Beljakova-Miller, e-mail message to Michael Miller

Picked this Russian recipe for black bread from Ruslife. I can't bake, so please don't come back to me if it doesn't work! I quote: "When you get the urge for Russian brown bread but can't get to Moscow, try this very good recipe. We wish we could remember where we found it, so we could credit the cook. If it is yours, let us know!"

2 cups whole wheat flour

1 cup rye flour

1 cup rolled oats

1 cup corn meal

1 cup unbleached flour

1 cup allbran

1/2 cup powdered milk

1/4 cup honey

1/4 cup olive oil

Big spoon of dry yeast

Pinch salt maybe

Water as required, but careful.

2 bowls (1 large, 1 small) and a large stout spoon

1. Sprinkle small amount cornmeal in bottom of a dry pan and I guarantee you that the loaf will not stick. Old beat up iron pans are the best. Never aluminum.
2. Save all of the 1 cup unbleached flour for kneading the dough later on.
3. Mix all remaining dry ingredients in the large mixing bowl that's larger than you think you will need.
4. Prepare warm water; use less than you think is needed. The water should be almost hot. The mixing bowl and spoon should be preheated with hot water. Everything should be at room temperature except for the water which is very warm but not hot.
5. Mix half the warm water with the powdered milk, honey, salt, oil. You can include the dry yeast if you wish to see it foam (called proof the yeast).
6. Add the warm water mixture containing the milk, honey, salt, and oil solution to the mixing bowl containing the prepared dry ingredients. Mix well until you are exhausted. Then set in a comfortably warm place until dough rises.
8. Then knead again, noting that the dough has acquired a very different consistency in that it has elasticity now whereas originally it was a blob of gelatinous glop.

9. Dump the unused 1 cup unbleached flour onto the smoothest table top you can find and commence kneading the dough with the flour until again you are exhausted. The smooth table top I use is a 3 ft x 3 ft marble slab made especially for kneading dough. My wife, out of desperation, made me a present of it 20 years ago .

10. In about 1/2 hour you will begin to see the wonders of home baked bread from scratch. Let the dough rise one last time, or if you need the exercise knead it again and then form it into a proper loaf and tenderly deposit it on top of the few bits of cornmeal in the prepared iron baking pan.

11. Bake at 350 degrees F. for 30-50 minutes. You can preheat the oven, or, if energy conscious, place the formed loaf in the oven, let it rise, then start the oven while the loaf is in the act of rising. The secret is to catch it on the rise, too early or too late and you will have a less desirable bread.

Notes of interest

You can use most any grain product in this bread. Cooked leftovers such as oatmeal, cornbread, rice, old biscuits, crackers; so there is no waste.

I have great luck including brown sugar, raisins, and dates in the dough and often obtain the most astonishing results. This type bread seems to satisfy a nostalgic type of hunger that no store bought bread can satisfy.