

Old-fashioned Winter Oatmeal Bread

My friend of many decades, Nancyjo Terres, who taught me how to make one of my first white breads while we were roommates, gave me this excellent recipe, which was torn from an old calendar. She swore that it made the best oatmeal bread, hearty and soul satisfying. I agree. A cold climate grain, oats have a flavor is mildly sweet and nutty. They are popular staples in the breads of Switzerland, Scandinavia, Ireland, northern Europe, and the British Isles. You may use rolled oats or quick-cooking flakes, which are smaller and absorb moisture quicker, interchangeably. Since oats have a low gluten content, they must be used with a high percentage of wheat flour to hold a loaf shape, otherwise the breads will be like flat and very crumbly. Oat breads are highly nutritious, rich in minerals and protein.

Appearance

This is a bread with a delicate, nubby texture and tight crumb, creamy in color. It easily holds its shape when sliced, even when warm, and is excellent toasted. It has a soft tawny thin crust around the entire loaf and earthy sweet flavor.

Equipment

Small and large (at least 6 quart) mixing bowls
Measuring spoons and cups
Large balloon whisk and wooden spoon
Heavy-duty electric mixer with flat paddle attachment or dough hook (optional)
Plastic and metal dough scrapers
Dough container (I recommend a 6-quart deep plastic container)
Pastry brush
Serrated knife for scoring
Cooling rack

Baking pans and yield

2 large 8-by-4-inch metal, nonstick, glass, or clay loaf pans, greased on all surfaces, or round loaves using 1 greased or parchment-lined 11-by-16-inch baking sheet. If using glass or black-finish aluminum pans, reduce heat by 25°.

Baking temperature 375°

Timetable

Total preparation time About 4 hours

Working time 15 minutes

Kneading time About 5 minutes

First rise 1 1/2 to 2 hours

Shaping time: 5 to 10 minutes

Second rise 45 minutes

Baking time 40 to 45 minutes

1/2 cup warm water (105° to 115°)

1 1/2 tablespoons (1 1/2 packages) active dry yeast

Pinch of sugar

2 cups warm milk (105° to 115°)

1/2 cup honey

4 tablespoons (1/2 stick) unsalted butter, melted

1 tablespoon salt

2 cups rolled oats

5 to 5 1/2 cups unbleached all-purpose or hi-gluten bread flour

Extra rolled oats, for sprinkling

2 tablespoons melted unsalted butter, for brushing

1. **Proofing the yeast:** In a small bowl or one-cup liquid measuring cup, pour in the 1/2 cup of the warm water. Sprinkle the yeast and the sugar over the surface of the water. Stir to dissolve and let stand at room temperature until foamy, about 10 minutes.

2. **Mixing the dough:** In a large bowl using a whisk or in the workbowl of a heavy-duty electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, combine the milk, honey, melted butter, salt, rolled oats, and 1 1/2 cups of the unbleached flour. Beat hard until creamy, about 1 minute. Stir in the yeast mixture. Add the remaining flour, 1/2 cup at a time, until a soft, shaggy dough that just clears the sides of the bowl is formed, switching to a wooden spoon when necessary if making by hand.

3. **Kneading:** Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface with the plastic pastry scraper and knead until soft and springy, 1 to 3 minutes for a machine-mixed dough and a hand-mixed dough 4 to 7 minutes, dusting with flour only 1 tablespoon at a time, just enough

as needed to prevent sticking. The dough will be smooth and springy with a nubby surface but not dry.

4. **First rise:** Place the dough into a lightly greased deep container. Turn the dough once to coat the top and cover with plastic wrap. Let rise at room temperature until double in bulk, about 1 1/2 to 2 hours.

5. **Shaping and second rise:** Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface to deflate. Grease the two greased 8-by-4-inch loaf pans that have been sprinkled with rolled oats on the bottom and sides, or grease or line the baking sheet and sprinkle it with oats if making round loaves. Without working the dough further, divide the dough into 2 equal portions. Pat each portion of dough into a rough rectangle and roll each up into a loaf shape. Place the loaves, seam side down, in the pans. Alternately, form into 2 round loaves. With your palms, press the portion gently to release trapped carbon dioxide and push the edges under to form a smooth top and rounded shape. Rotate the dough, pulling the top surface taut and tightly domed into the bottom center. Lift up the loaf and pull the bottom center together for extra tautness. This makes for a high, well-rounded baked loaf. If the loaf looks flat, repeat the process. Place the loaves, seam-side down, on the baking sheet at least 4 inches apart to allow for expansion. Roll the loaf to attach some oats up the sides. Brush the tops with the some melted butter. Cover loosely with plastic wrap and let rise at room temperature until the dough is fully double in bulk or about 1 inch over the rims of the pans, about 45 minutes. Twenty minutes before baking, preheat the oven to 375°.

6. **Baking off and cooling:** Brush the tops with the remaining melted butter and using a serrated knife, make 3 pairs of opposing diagonal slashes down the top of the loaf to form a herringbone V design, no more than 1/4 inch deep. Place the pans on the center rack of the preheated oven and bake about 40 to 45 minutes, or until the surface of the loaves are golden brown, the sides slightly contract from the pan, and sound hollow when tapped with your finger. Remove the loaves from the pans immediately to a cooling rack. Loaves are best slightly warm or at room temperature.

Storage

Oatmeal breads have a good shelf life and do not stale quickly, staying moist about 3 days. Store the unsliced bread wrapped in a plastic food storage bag at room temperature or freeze (page xx).

Baker's Notes

- Oat grains have no gluten, so do not add more than about 20 percent in volume, about 1 cup oats to 3 cups of wheat flour, to your wheat-based doughs to avoid a flat loaf.
- Some bakers presoak rolled oats, especially the sturdier regular or coarse Irish brands, in some of the liquid for about an hour to reduce moisture absorption during the rising periods.
- For a smoother texture, some bakers grind the oats to a coarse flour before making the dough.
- A good-quality granola cereal blend or mixture of rolled grains (such as rye, oats, and barley) can be substituted for the rolled oats.
- Maple syrup can be substituted for the honey for a distinctive and highly compatible flavor pairing with the oats.

Specific Skills

- Preparing a straight dough with oats.
- Shaping a pan or round hearth loaf.
- Slashing a herringbone design.