

## Italian Whole-Wheat Walnut-Raisin Bread

I think this is one of the best breads in the Western world. It is just plain fabulous and a peasant bread of the first degree. It is distinctively stamped with the fragrance of raisins and walnuts in a dense-textured whole-grain dough. Use a fruity Italian extra-virgin olive oil for this *pane allae noci e uva*, as the special quality it gives the bread is very desirable. It is a spectacular bread with cheese and toasted could become addictive. Serve as a harvest-time appetizer with Grilled Cheese in Fragrant Leaves (following).

Yield: 3 round or 2 baguette-style loaves

2 tablespoons (2 packages) active dry yeast

Pinch of light brown or 1 teaspoon of honey

2 1/2 cups warm water (105° to 115°)

1/2 cup Italian extra-virgin olive oil

1/4 cup local honey

1 tablespoon salt

4 cups fine-grind whole-wheat flour, preferably stone-ground

1 1/2 to 1 3/4 cups unbleached all-purpose flour

2 cups (10 ounces) dark raisins, plumped in hot water 1 hour and drained on paper towels

3 cups (12 ounces) broken or chopped walnuts

2 tablespoons *each* whole-wheat flour and miller's wheat bran for sprinkling

1. In a small bowl, sprinkle the yeast and sugar over 1/2 cup of the warm water. Stir to dissolve. Let stand until foamy, about 10 minutes.
2. In a large mixing bowl with a whisk, or in the work bowl of a heavy-duty electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, whisk together the remaining 2 cups warm water, the olive oil, honey, salt, and 2 cups of the whole-wheat flour. Add the yeast mixture. Beat vigorously until smooth, about 1 minute. Add the remaining whole-wheat, 1/2 cup at a time. After adding all of the whole-wheat flour, add the unbleached flour, 1/4 cup at a time, until a soft dough is formed that just clears the sides of the bowl, switching to a wooden spoon when necessary.
3. Turn out the dough onto a very lightly flour-dusted work surface and knead until a soft, springy dough is formed that is resilient to the touch, adding only 1 tablespoon flour at a time

as necessary to prevent sticking. The dough should retain a smooth, soft quality, with some tackiness under the surface, yet still hold its own shape. Do not add too much flour, as the loaf will be too dry and hard to work. Place in an olive oil greased deep container, turn once to coat the top, and cover with plastic wrap. Let rise at room temperature until doubled in bulk, 2 to 2 1/2 hours.

4. Turn out the dough out onto a clean work surface without punching it down. Pat it into a large oval and sprinkle evenly with half the drained raisins and the walnuts. Press the nuts and fruit into the dough and roll it up. Pat it into an oval once again and sprinkle evenly with the remaining raisins and nuts. Press in and roll the dough up again. Divide the dough into 3 equal portions or in half and shape into 3 tight round loaves or 2 baguettes, each about 14 inches long, gently pulling the surface taut from the bottom on both. Combine the 2 tablespoons each whole-wheat flour and bran and sprinkle on a greased or parchment-lined baking sheet. Place the loaves on the prepared pan. Cover loosely with plastic wrap and let rise at room temperature until doubled, 45 minutes to 1 hour. Twenty minutes before baking, preheat the oven at 400°, with a baking stone if desired.

5. Using a serrated knife, slash the loaf or loaves quickly with two parallel lines and one line intersecting no deeper than 1/4 inch. Place the baking sheet directly on the stone or on an oven rack and bake until the loaves are brown, crusty, and sound hollow when tapped on the bottom, 35 to 40 minutes for the rounds and 25 to 30 minutes for the baguettes. Remove to a rack to cool completely before slicing.

### **Grilled Cheese in Fragrant Leaves**

The essence of the grape leaves is infused into the flavor of the cheese during grilling over an outdoor charcoal fire. Fresh fig leaves may be substituted for the grape leaves.

Yield: 8 servings

1/2 to 3/4 pound hard cheese, such as Fontina, Gruyère, smoked Cheddar, or 1 pound fresh goat cheese

16 to 24 fresh grape leaves, washed and patted dry

1 loaf Italian Whole-Wheat Walnut-Raisin Bread, thinly sliced

1. Prepare a charcoal fire in a grill. Cut or slice the cheese into thick slices that can easily be wrapped in the grape leaves. Place a piece of the cheese in the center of the leaf on the side of

the leaf that has heavy veins. Fold the base of the leaf over the cheese and then wrap completely in the leaf. Use a second leaf, if necessary to encase the entire surface. Carefully secure with a toothpick.

2. Place the wrapped bundles on the grill rack 4 to 5 inches above the coals. Grill, turning once, just until the cheese melts, about 5 minutes total. To serve, present each guest with 2 bundles of cheese to unwrap and spread it while warm on the slices of fresh bread.