

BREAD MACHINE BASICS & BEYOND

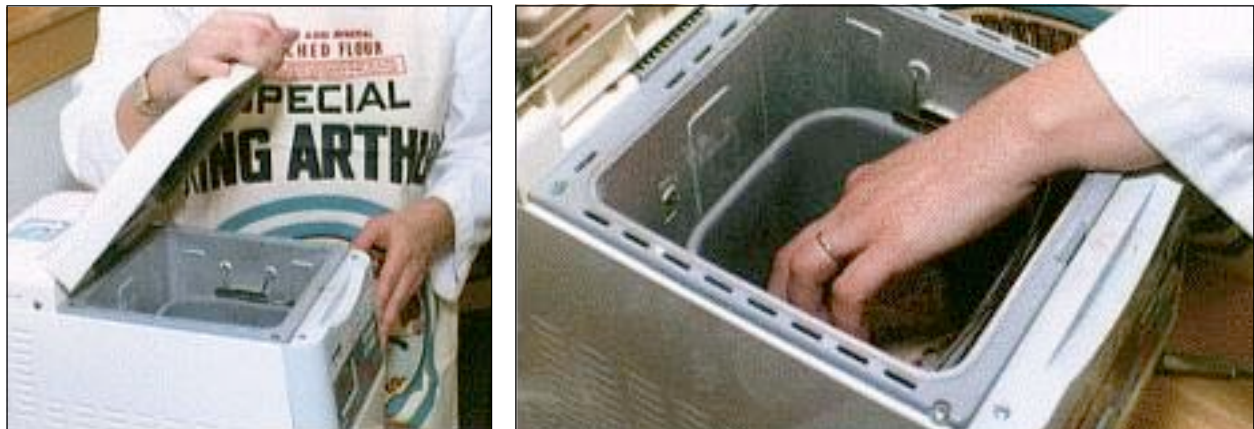
with Robyn Sargent

BASICS OF DOUGH CONSISTENCY

Becoming familiar with a healthy ball of dough is the first step toward perfect bread machine bread. Because air humidity fluctuates, the amount of liquid called for in a recipe may not be correct depending on the weather. On humid days, you may find the recipe yields a wet, sloppy dough that sticks to the sides of your bread pan as it kneads. During dry weather (often in winter here in the North Country) you may find a tight, gnarly looking ball of dough in the machine. Sometimes the dough won't even come together, but breaks up into small pieces.



If the dough seems dry, add warm water, a tablespoon at a time, until the dough smooths out into a soft, uniform ball.



It will soon become second nature for you to lift the top of your bread machine and poke the dough early in the kneading cycle (never do so during baking.)



If the dough looks sticky, simply add flour, also a tablespoon at a time, until it also smooths out and creates a ball.

Once you have mastered dough texture, most of your loaves will be perfectly shaped. There are a few variables, however, which will keep you from “the perfect loaf,” which leads us to the next part of the class, the role of ingredients.

THE ROLE OF INGREDIENTS *Without getting too scientific here, it's helpful to know a little about what part your ingredients are playing in the making of your loaf.*

FLOUR Flour is the building block of bread. Good bread flour is unbleached and contains enough gluten (an elastic substance related to protein) to create a stretchy net to hold the carbon dioxide given off by yeast activity. Without adequate protein, nothing could capture this gas and the loaf would resemble a hockey puck. If you keep getting hockey puck loaves, make sure to check the protein of the flour. The protein level of King Arthur Unbleached All-Purpose Flour is 11.7%, more than the industry standard of 9.5–10.5%. For even higher protein, our Special For Machines Bread Flour contains 12.7%, the highest available in supermarket bread flours. *By measuring flour as described below, you will avoid adding too much flour to your bread and you will make all of your baking more consistent.*



The quality of flour affects your results, and so does the way you measure it. First aerate the flour (no need to sift.) Second, gently scoop it into a cup. Third, level it off without shaking it or packing it down.

YEAST Yeast is the worker bee in breads. By multiplying its cells, it produces a gas called carbon dioxide, the agent that, working in tandem with gluten, leavens bread. Active dry and instant yeasts both work well in most bread machines.

SWEETENERS Sweeteners like sugar, honey and molasses serve as yeast foods. When yeast consumes these, it produces even more carbon dioxide. Sweeteners also make the bread taste good. Honey and molasses may even extend the shelf life of your loaf by trapping water molecules and keeping them evenly suspended in the bread. Too much sweetener in a recipe may cause the yeast to over-eat. It becomes sluggish, activity declines, and carbon dioxide production diminishes. A loaf with too much sweetener may be dense and heavy.

SALT Salt is a key ingredient in yeasted breads and baked goods. For one thing, salt free breads taste flat. More importantly, salt keeps yeast activity in check. Without salt, yeast would produce so much carbon dioxide, the loaf would rise and then explode, leaving you a tall mushroom-topped loaf, or worse, a sunken top.

FATS Oil, lard, butter, margarine and shortening are all forms of fat. These play a critical role in keeping bread tender, good tasting, and long lived. Staling would occur quickly in breads without fat as there would be nothing to trap water molecules and keep them suspended in the loaf. Instead, the moisture would migrate to the outside of the loaf and evaporate.

Aside from these important ingredients, there are a few items that can have an impact on how tall your loaf is. Cinnamon, cloves, allspice and garlic may limit yeast production of carbon dioxide. The more you use of these ingredients, the denser the loaf will be. You should also know that chlorine in water can inhibit yeast. If you have a chlorinated water source, try leaving the water out overnight on your kitchen counter. The chlorine gas will dissipate in the air. You can then use the water in yeast baking with no ill effects.

With this abundance of information, let's move on to the hands-on part of the class.

HARVEST CRACKED WHEAT BREAD

This bread will introduce you to the basics of bread machine baking. It uses a blend of white and wheat for a taller rise; sunflower seeds offer a nutty flavor.

What You'll Need

1/4 cup cracked wheat
1-1 1/8 cups water
1/4 cup olive oil
3 tbsp. sugar
1 tsp. salt
2 cups King Arthur Unbleached Special
Bread Flour
1 cup King Arthur Traditional Whole
Wheat Flour
1 tbsp. vital wheat gluten (optional)
1/4 tsp. active dry yeast

DIRECTIONS

Place the cracked wheat and the water in the bread pan. Allow 30 minutes to soften the cracked wheat before adding anything else. By soaking the cracked wheat in the warm water for 30 minutes, you will soften the wheat and make the rest of the recipe easier (**Figure 1.**) Add the rest of the ingredients, select “light crust” setting and “whole wheat” cycle (**Figure 2.**) Press “start.” Add the ingredients in the order called for by the recipe. The machine will mix them for you once it’s started. Optional: add the yeast and salt to opposite corners of the bread pan. Since salt inhibits yeast growth, this gives your yeast every possible chance to start strong.

Observe the dough as it kneads. After 5–10 minutes, if it appears dry and stiff or if your machine sounds as if it’s straining to knead it, add more liquid—1 tablespoon at a time until dough forms a smooth, soft, pliable ball that is slightly tacky to the touch. If the dough seems dry, add warm water, a tablespoon at a time, until the dough smooths out into a soft, uniform ball. Remove the bread from the bucket and cool on a rack for an hour before serving (**Figure 3.**)



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Add the ingredients in the order called for by the recipe. The machine will mix them for you once it's started.



Optional: add the yeast and salt to opposite corners of the bread pan. Since salt inhibits yeast growth, this gives your yeast every possible chance to start strong.

PORTUGUESE SWEET BREAD

This made-in-the-machine sweet bread is delicious with tea, coffee or as a breakfast bread toasted and slathered with jam.

What You'll Need

- 1 cup evaporated milk
- 3 tbsp. unsalted butter, cut into pieces
- 2 large eggs
- 1 1/2 tsp. finely grated lemon rind
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 6 tbsp. sugar
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1/4 tsp. ascorbic acid
- 3 cups King Arthur Unbleached All-Purpose Flour
- 2 tsp. instant yeast

DIRECTIONS

Place all of the ingredients into the pan of your bread machine in the order suggested by the manufacturer. Select "basic white" bread cycle, and press "start." It is normal for the edges of this loaf to darken a bit, because of the amount of sugar in the recipe.



The evaporated milk, ascorbic acid, eggs, lemon rind and vanilla (butter, sugar, salt & yeast not shown.) This is a good recipe to build your confidence, because it is fairly easy with a bit of a challenge.



CLASSIC FOUGASSE BREAD

Ready, set...let's go. By now you should be ready to graduate onto the most difficult part of the course. Using your machine's dough or manual cycle. This fougasse is a rustic French flat bread, studded with golden raisins and flavored with rosemary. It makes a beautiful presentation bread.

What You'll Need

DOUGH

3 cups King Arthur Unbleached All-Purpose Flour
2 tbsp. pumppernickel
1 1/2 tsp. salt
2 tsp. sugar
2 tsp. instant yeast
1 cup + 2 tbsp. water
2 tbsp. olive oil

FILLING

1 cup walnuts, toasted and coarsely chopped
2 tbsp. fresh rosemary (or 1 1/2 tsp. dried rosemary)
1/2 cup golden raisins

BREAD MACHINE METHOD Place all of the ingredients into the pan of your machine, program the machine for "manual" or "dough," and press "start." Allow the dough to rise in the machine for an additional hour after it finishes its cycle.

FILLING AND SHAPING THE DOUGH Gently deflate the dough. On a lightly oiled work surface, pat the dough into a 12-inch square, as shown below. Spread half of the ingredients evenly over the middle third of the dough, going to within 1/2-inch of each edge, then fold one edge over the middle, letter-style. Top with the remaining filling, and fold the remaining edge over the middle. Pinch all of the edges together to seal, as shown below.



Pull out the dough and form it into a smooth ball before going ahead with the rest of the recipe.



On a floured surface, roll and pat the dough into a 12-inch square. If the dough springs back, simply be patient and give the dough a chance to rest. Mark the dough into thirds by making small indentations with your finger (only you will see these.)



Evenly spread half of the rosemary, half of the nuts and half of the raisins in the middle third of the dough.



Fold one edge over the middle, as if folding a letter. Top with the rest of the rosemary, nuts and raisins. Then, fold the remaining edge toward the center, covering the filling.

To shape the dough into a tree, widen the rectangle at the bottom, and narrow it at the top to make a kind of rounded-edge triangle. Sighting along an imaginary center line, top to bottom the long way, make three diagonal, matching cuts on each side of the line. Pull the dough apart, as for the ladder shape.



Seal the dough tightly. Then press it flat, as shown, coaxing it into the rough shape of a Christmas tree or a simple rectangle if you wish. Be gentle so you don't rip the dough



Make 3 parallel diagonal cuts on each side, slicing completely through the dough. Enlarge the holes with your fingers.

To shape the dough into a tree, widen the rectangle at the bottom, and narrow it at the top to make a kind of rounded-edge triangle. Sighting along an imaginary center line, top to bottom the long way, make three diagonal, matching cuts on each side of the line. Pull the dough apart, as for the ladder shape. You'll find this can be a somewhat messy process. The filling spills out, the dough splits and tears, and the fougasse looks pretty awful. Just remember—this is supposed to be a rustic loaf, and looks aren't everything. Where the filling spills out, stuff it back in someplace else. Where the dough tears, pinch a piece of dough from a thicker part of the fougasse and make repairs. As the dough rises, then rises even more as it bakes, these areas of repair will disappear.

BAKING THE BREAD Cover the dough gently with lightly greased plastic wrap, and allow it to rise until puffy but not doubled in size, about 1 hour. Brush the dough with olive oil, or spray it with olive-oil spray. Bake the bread in a preheated 425°F oven for 20 minutes, or until it's golden brown.



Transfer the dough onto a greased or parchment-lined baking sheet. Let rise until puffy, but not doubled in size, about 1 hour. Spray or lightly brush with olive oil. Then bake it! Twenty minutes at 425°F should do the trick.