



WHOLEMEAL LOAF

The quantities below make one small loaf approx 500g in 6" x 4" tin

Ingredients

255 wholemeal bread flour

60g strong white flour

4g salt

4g dried yeast (if not "active yeast" then dissolve in some of the water first)

15 of soft brown sugar (optional, adds flavour and helps retain moisture, muscovado is best)

180 warm water (warmer if flour is cold)

20 olive oil

Method

Mix the flours, sugar, yeast, warm water and salt until all the flour is incorporated in the dough. Knead the dough briefly then add the olive oil and knead it into the dough.

Kneading the dough – 15 minutes

Use whatever style of kneading suits you. Because wholemeal dough takes longer to develop gluten knead for about 15 minutes. A wet dough is messier but will rise better so think twice about adding extra flour. A better answer to a dough that is a bit too wet would be to set it aside for 5 or 10 minutes once it is mixed to allow the flour to absorb the moisture. Once it's kneaded place the dough in a moistened bowl and slightly moisten the top surface. Cover the dough with clingfilm and leave in a warm place for 1 hour.

To shape into loaves and prove – 35 minutes

Turn on the oven at 180°C.

Turn the dough onto the board and knock the gas out of it. Roll up the dough into a log shape. Place loaf in lightly oiled tin with seam down. Dough should fill the tins two-thirds full. Cover and leave in a warm place to prove for 30 to 40 minutes.

Preparing the loaf for the oven - 5 minutes

Dust with white flour or semolina then cut diagonal slits 1/2 inch deep to allow the dough to continue to expand in the oven. Alternatively leave the top as it is then brush with olive or walnut oil when the loaf come out of the oven. This gives a nice sheen and smell to the loaves. If the dough seems about to collapse (over proved) when you try to make a cut then abandon the slashing and just get it in the oven as quickly as possible.

Baking – 50 minutes

Bake at 180°C for 45-55 minutes. Pour half a cup of hot water onto a hot skillet in the bottom of the oven just after the breads go in. This keeps the top soft so that the loaves can continue to rise and also helps to form a good crust. The bread is done when the top is golden brown, the sides and bottoms are golden brown, and the shoulders of the loaf are firm. If loaves are soft on the bottom or at the shoulder put them back in the oven upside down without the tins for another 5 minutes or so.

Remove the loaves from the bread tins immediately and cool on wire trays. This bread keeps well and freezes well with little loss of flavour or freshness.

ADDITIONAL TIPS

Two techniques to improve flavour

Sponge mixtures and use of "old dough" in breads gives a better taste to the bread and makes the bread easier to digest. You can use either these methods with almost any breads.

Sponge mixture (mixed the previous evening) for the wholemeal loaf recipe above:

125 lukewarm water

1 dried yeast or 2 fresh yeast

60 strong white flour, 60 wholemeal bread flour (ie strong flour)

Making the sponge mixture – 15 minutes

Dissolve the yeast in the warm water in a 2 litre baking bowl.

Mix in the strong white and wholemeal flour.

Cover the bowl and leave overnight somewhere warmish say 15 to 20°C. The sponge will rise then fall back but will revive when you add the remaining ingredients given below.

200 wholemeal flour

4 salt

1 dried yeast

60 of warm water (if the sponge is cold use warmer water)

15 of soft brown sugar (optional)

20 olive oil

Using "old dough"

If you are using "old dough" take it out of the fridge the evening before you bake and leave it somewhere warmish. Knead it in at the end of the main kneading. Remember to cut off the same amount as you added just before you shape the dough ready for the loaf tin. Store this in the fridge for your next bake. In order to get this going you need to add say 10% more of each ingredient just once in order to have a 10% chunk to cut of and save.

Altering the size

You may want to make larger or smaller loaves in which case you need to adjust baking time and temperature. The larger the loaf the longer it needs to bake to allow time for heat to penetrate to the centre but at a lower temperature so that the top isn't blackened. Conversely, with smaller doughs increase the temperature and reduce the baking time. Also, this dough doesn't have to go in a loaf tin. It could equally well be a small cob or be divided up into rolls.

If you want to make several loaves then simply multiply up all the ingredients except for the yeast which you should increase maybe by say 75% if you are doubling a recipe.

Your flour versus my flour

The amount of water in the recipe above is pretty accurate for the flour I use but your flour may absorb more or less so hold back a little of the liquid the first time and see what happens. The same goes for adjusting the ratio of white to wholemeal or substituting other flours such as rye or malt. Wholemeal absorbs more liquid than white which absorbs more than rye.

Try **Mungoswells** strong wholemeal flour for this bread (from Real Foods). The flavour and texture are great.

Croutons

Cut the bread into roughly one inch cubes then toss them in a bowl with a little olive or sunflower oil so the cubes are moistened, not soaked. Now sprinkle with salt and if you like with dried herbs or chopped parsley.

Spread the cubes out on a baking tray then bake in a pre-heated oven at 150°C minutes. They should be crunchy but still a wee bit soft in the middle.



The croutons are good not just in soups but also with salads.