

Sambodhi Prem's simple bread recipe

Ingredients

- 3 cups of flour, white wheat flour is the easiest to use.
- cup of water (plus a little more... see below)
- 1/4 teaspoon of salt
- pinch of dried yeast
- pinch of ginger powder (optional)

- big glass or ceramic bowl
- oven safe cup with water
- a bread tin or oven dish

• Put the flour in a bowl.

• Heat the water so that it is luke warm. Rule of thumb: if it burns you thumb it is too hot! (Thanks Clive Lawler!)

• Dissolve the salt and the ginger powder into the water. (ginger is a yeast promotor)

• Take the water off the heat, check that it is luke warm and put in the yeast.

• Let the yeast dissolve for a minute or two, occasionally stir.

• Add the water to the flour and mix.

Over time you will get a feeling for when the mixture is right. Most breads fail because the mixture is too dry. It is hard to give you exact water quantities because the amount of water you use depends on how much water the flour is able to absorb. This varies for each flour. The water quantity can also change depending on the climate you're in. In a cold and dry climate you'll need more water than in a hot and humid one.

Make sure the flour and water are well mixed together by kneading. You want to achieve a smooth texture without lumps.

Put the dough back in the bowl and cover it with a plate or a tea towel. Leave it in a warm place, a hot water cylinder cupboard is ideal.

Leave it for at least 24 hours. You can leave it for 48 hours, it will make your bread even more digestible, because yeast will predigest the flour if it is given *time* to do its job. You only need the tiniest amount of yeast to do this.

This process of long fermentation is what is missing in modern bread making, making it difficult for many people to digest modern, factory produced breads. That's not the way it used to be, but through 'modernization', we lost the craft of baking bread, rising it loooong and baking it slooow!

• After 48 hours take the dough out of the bowl and give it its second kneed.

• Oil the bread tin with olive oil and put the dough in.

• leave the bread to rise a second time. I put it in an oven that is barely warm, 50 degrees Celcius (122 degrees Fahrenheit), but you can also use the hot water cylinder cupboard again (cover the bread with a tea towel) or a sunny spot in your house. (away from the dog!)

Another good place to rise bread is in a car that's parked in the sun. Make sure to wrap the bread tin up in a towel, so not to spoil the upholstery!

• Occasionally check the bread – if it has risen to the top of the tin, it is ready to bake. This second rising can take 2 or 3 hours.

• Pre-heat the oven to 180 degrees Celcius (356 Fahrenheit) and put an oven dish filled with water in it. This will increase the humidity in the oven and help with the heat transmission. It is the same principle as with a sauna, if you pour water on the hot stones the sauna gets hotter. The quicker the heat of the oven gets transfered to the bread, the quicker the crust will form. Once the crust is formed it seals off the moisture that's inside the bread, making the bread crusty on the outside and soft and moist on the inside.

• When the oven is pre-heated put in the bread and bake it for 45 minutes.

• After 45 minutes take it out of the oven and out of the bread tin. Pop it onto a rack, so that the bread can cool. Voila, bon appetite!

ps

Experiment with other types of flour for flavorsome breads. Adding 1 cup of rice flour instead of white wheat flour makes the bread more crunchy, while adding spelt or rye flour gives yet a different texture and taste.

I use at least one cup of white wheat flour in my mixes as it helps with raising the bread.