

NEW

POPULAR
KITCHEN™
SERIES

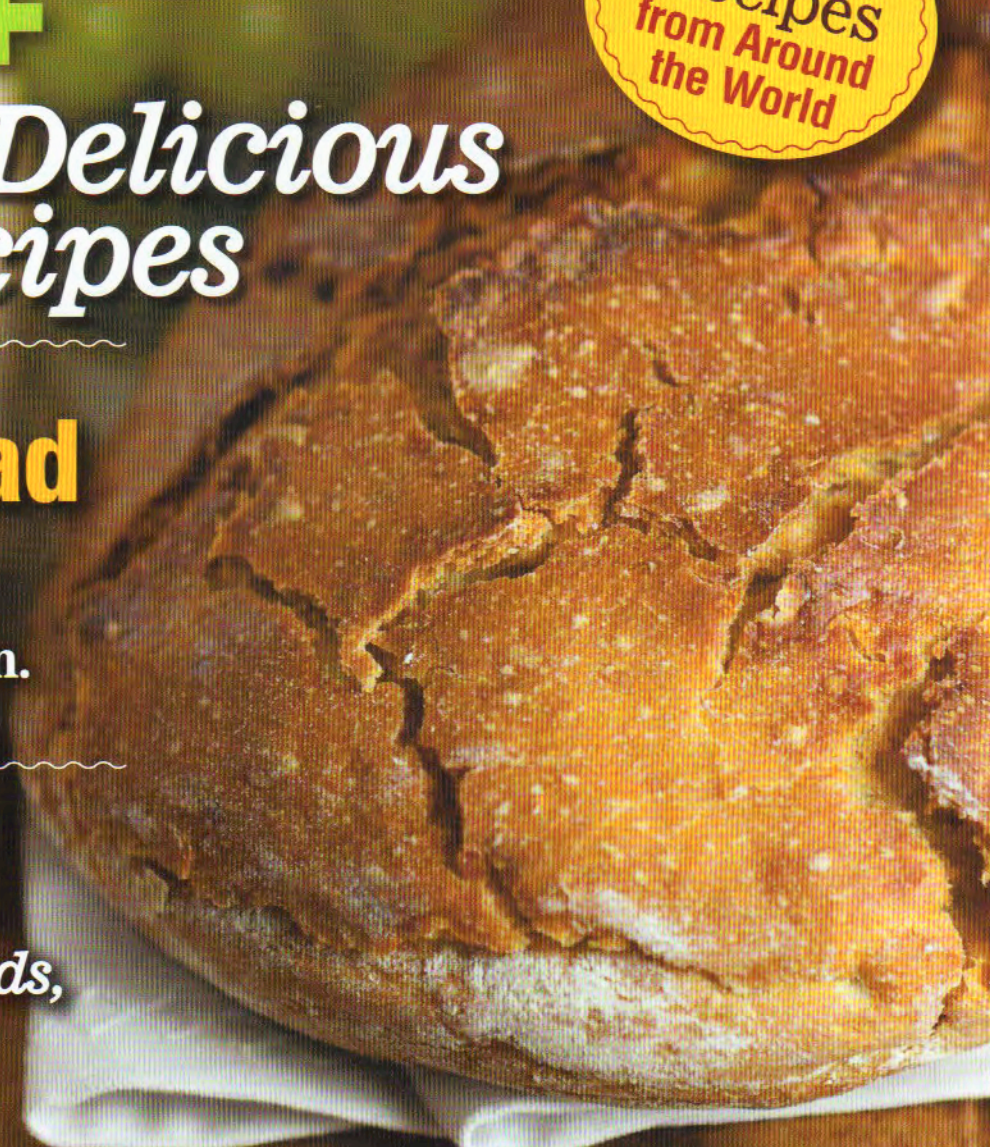
homemade bread™

50+ *Delicious
Recipes*

Bread
Recipes
from Around
the World

Make
**no-knead
bread**
in **10** min.

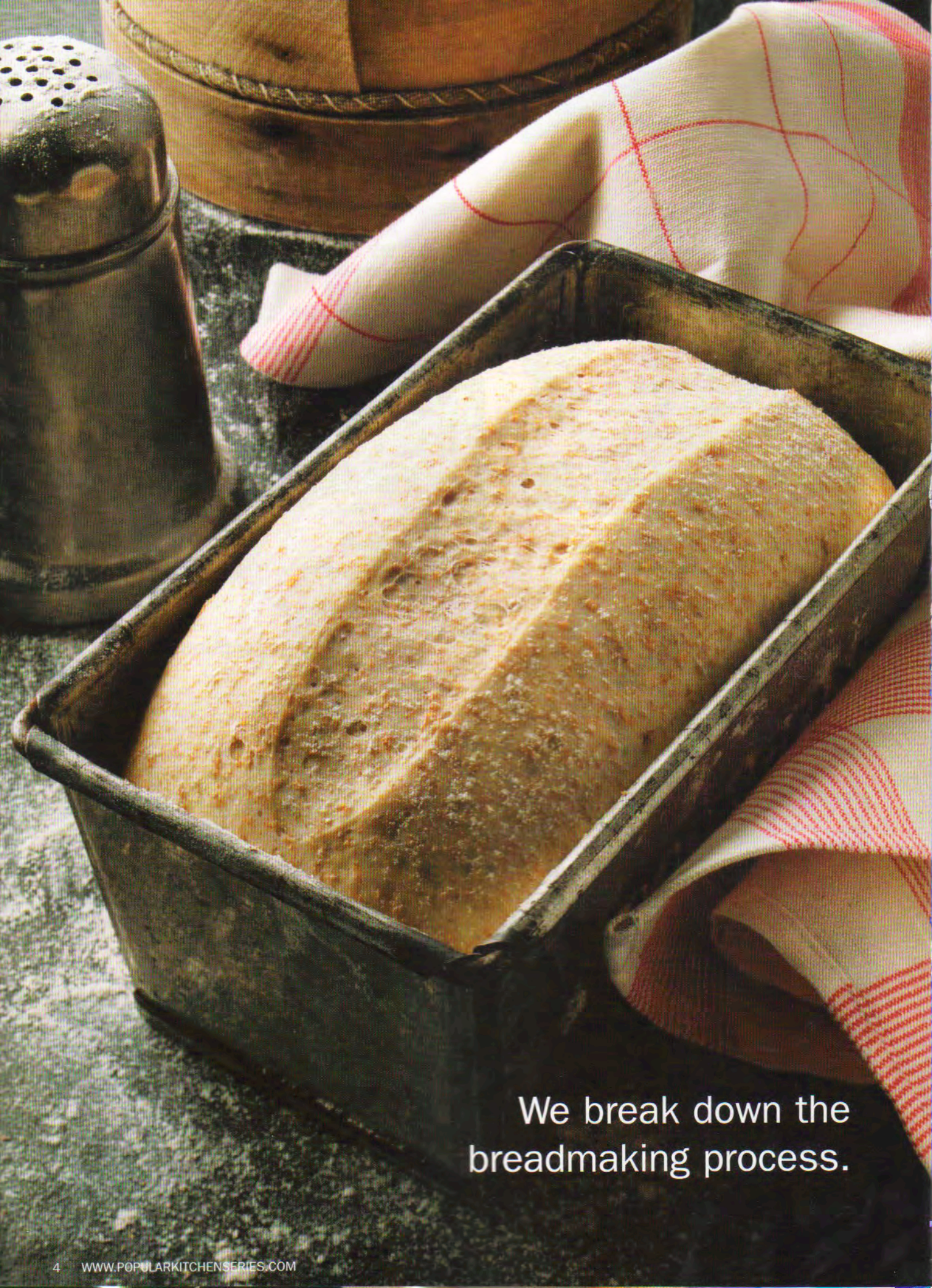
**no yeast
no fuss**
*quick breads,
biscuits
and more*



What You Knead to Know

- Easy techniques
- Essential ingredients

FROM THE EDITORS OF HOBBY FARM HOME® MAGAZINE



We break down the
breadmaking process.



by bread alone

By Nancy Mann Jackson

as a young girl, Annalise Kaylor watched her grandmother's arthritic hands move through her bread dough, kneading and patting until it was just the right texture for the oven. "It's that romantic notion of making something tasty from flour, salt, yeast and water that got me into baking in the first place," says Kaylor, a competitive baker, member of The Bread Bakers Guild of America (www.bbga.org) and author of the popular baking blog KneadToBeLoaved.com.

Although sentimental, baking bread also can be practical and healthy. For many home bakers, it just makes sense to cook this most basic food at home. "We sometimes take bread for granted, thinking it is a pure and wholesome food," says Kathy Gillen, a wellness coach, nutritional consultant and mother of four who's baked bread for her family each week for years, "but food labels tell a different story. Commercially made breads are loaded with chemicals, sugars and preservatives. The simple task of making bread is a loving way to connect with your food and care about your family's health."

The Techniques

Home bakers can choose from various bread-baking techniques, and each one comes with advantages and disadvantages. Those who want to return to old-fashioned ways use the traditional yeast method with regular active-dry yeast. This method produces "classic sturdy breads with excellent texture and a well-developed flavor," says Linda Amendt, a cookbook author and the blogger behind TheBakingCorner.com. This process takes a long time because it involves proofing the yeast and waiting for two full risings, and it requires a lot more physical effort to knead and shape the dough, she says.



Equipment like stand mixers make kneading dough more efficient.

For many bakers, however, it's that hands-on, deliberate process that makes breadmaking so enjoyable. "I prefer to get my hands doughy," says Lillian Cauldwell, who has baked her family's bread since 1972. "It relaxes me and gives me time to think."

To save time, some bakers use the quick-rise yeast method with instant active-dry yeast. This method eliminates the need to proof the yeast, allowing ingredients to be quickly mixed, and requires shorter rising times, Amendt says. Depending on the recipe, though, even quick-rise breads might require two rising periods and kneading to develop flavor, texture and shape.

Increasingly, home bakers turn to the no-knead method, which usually uses instant active-dry yeast. These breads are made with a "very easy technique for making homemade bread with little effort," Amendt says, "but they usually require a long rising time to allow the dough to develop without kneading, and the technique can produce breads with a coarser texture than breads that go through a kneading and double-rising process."



Temperature and humidity can affect how quickly (or slowly) your dough rises.

PHOTOS BY JANET HORTON

Finally, some bakers use a bread machine to make homemade bread, which is best made with instant active-dry yeast formulated for bread machines. This fast, easy method gives all the work to the machine, Amendt says, "but bread made in a bread machine tends to be heavier, denser and firmer than oven-baked bread, and it has less flavor."

Some bakers, like Jennifer Patterson Lorenzetti of FastCheapAndGood.blogspot.com, use a combination of these methods. Lorenzetti sets her bread machine on the "dough" setting and uses the machine to handle the kneading and the first couple of rises, then she does the final rise and baking "by the old-school method," she says. She likes this technique because it requires less of her time in both preparation and cleanup, but the final product looks like a traditionally prepared loaf.

Kaylor recommends learning to knead by hand before relying on a machine. "While there certainly is value to using a machine for some steps, such as kneading, there are many benefits to kneading by hand," she says. "One of the best ways to learn about the science of baking bread is to feel the dough in your hands. The more you do it, the more you learn about how a recipe should feel for optimal results."

"While many advanced home bakers and professional bakers use a machine for the kneading, it takes experience to understand just how much or how little different types of dough should be kneaded," Kaylor says. "Beyond the learning experience, there is something about knowing you made the bread completely by hand that gives you satisfaction."

The Ingredients

One of the best things about baking bread is that the ingredients are cheap and easy to find. All it takes are flour, salt, yeast and water. We can choose from two basic types of dry yeast: active-dry yeast and instant active-dry yeast, also known as fast-rising, rapid-rise and quick-rise. Amendt cites multiple pluses for instant active-dry yeast: "The yeast does not require proofing, it can be mixed straight into the flour, the rising time can be reduced by up to half that of dough made with regular active-dry yeast, and depending on the recipe, it needs only one rising."

Your recipe usually will specify which type of yeast to use. Some recipes call for different types of flours, such as bread flour, all-purpose flour, whole wheat, corn, rye or flax. Creative bakers can add other ingredients to suit their tastes. For instance, Lorenzetti says one reason she began baking bread was to have the option to include healthy ingredients, like flax meal to get some additional omega-3 fatty acids in her diet or whey for the added protein.

The important thing to remember is that in all bread recipes, the flour measurement is flexible. "The biggest mistake most new bakers make is adding too much flour," Gillen says. "You want to add about half the flour called for, then add the rest slowly, just until the dough doesn't stick to the sides of the bowl or your fingers. Too much flour makes the bread dry."

The Process

Making bread from scratch is a hands-on chemistry experiment. Each of the steps — including kneading, rising and regulating the temperature — cause certain chemical reactions to take place that result in light, tasty loaves of bread.

Kneading the dough distributes the yeast throughout the dough to make it rise evenly. It also creates the structure and texture of the bread by developing the gluten in the flour.

"Kneading transforms the protein in the flour — glutenin and gliadin — from a goopy glob to a firm, tight, elastic dough," says Leslie Bilderback, a certified master baker, author and instructor at Ecole de Cuisine Los Angeles. "It is this elastic gluten that traps the gas of fermentation and lets the dough grow. Without it, the rise will be minimal, and the crumb will be dense."

Gluten is important because it "provides the structure that holds the carbon dioxide bubbles produced by the yeast, giving the dough its strength and elasticity to create better volume," Amendt adds. "Kneading also creates layers in the dough that produce a fine, tender crumb and light, airy texture in the finished bread."

When the bread dough is set out to rise, fermentation begins. "Fermentation is the process of yeast feeding on the dough's carbohydrates, moisture and oxygen," Bilderback says. "After feeding, the yeast



Many people enjoy breadmaking for its therapeutic aspects. There's lots of grabbing, squishing and punching!



Dough usually rises quickest in a dark, warm, draft-free place.



Test for doneness by thumping the bottom of the loaf. A cooked loaf sounds hollow.

produces two by-products: carbon dioxide and alcohol. In brewing, the yeast gives off more alcohol.

"In bread making, more carbon dioxide is produced," she continues. "Carbon dioxide gas accumulates in the dough and causes it to rise. The alcohol accumulation produces a sour-ish flavor, as in sourdough. The longer the dough ferments, the more of these by-products are produced. A good rise produces a well-textured crumb and a more flavorful dough."

Many bread recipes instruct bakers to allow bread to rise at least twice, sometimes more, to develop flavor and create a better texture. "The longer the yeast is allowed to multiply and ferment, the stronger and more intense the flavor of the loaf will be," Kaylor says. "This is the reason that many artisan breads are intensely rich in flavor and texture: They have been allowed to rise many times, often over stretches of days."

Throughout the breadmaking process, temperature plays an important role. When mixing the ingredients, consider the temperature of the water. "Active-dry yeast is in a dormant stage, and it becomes active when combined with warm, moist ingredients," Amendt says. "The temperature of the liquid ingredients depends on whether you are making a recipe with instant active-dry yeast, which requires warmer liquids added directly to the yeast-flour mixture, or a recipe



To prevent gummy bread, cool the loaf completely before slicing.

made with regular active-dry yeast, where the yeast will need to be proofed in a warm liquid before being added to the other ingredients. The recipe will specify the temperature for the liquids and method to be used."

Bilderback says she likes to make the fermentation process as long as possible, so she uses cold water and allows her bread to rise in a cool environment. Most bakers, however, use water that is room temperature or a little warmer to jump-start the fermentation process.

When it's time for the bread to rise, the temperature remains important. "Yeast ferments best when the dough rises at temperatures between 80 and 95 degrees Fahrenheit," Amendt says. "This is the ideal range to achieve the best structure, texture and flavor from your dough.

"At cooler temperatures, the yeast becomes less active and grows slower," she continues. "At warmer temperatures, the yeast will grow too quickly. A fast rise at a high temperature can yield a tougher, heavier bread with large air pockets. Yeast begins to die at 120 degrees Fahrenheit, so it is important to let your yeast dough rise in a location away from drafts that is warm but not too hot."

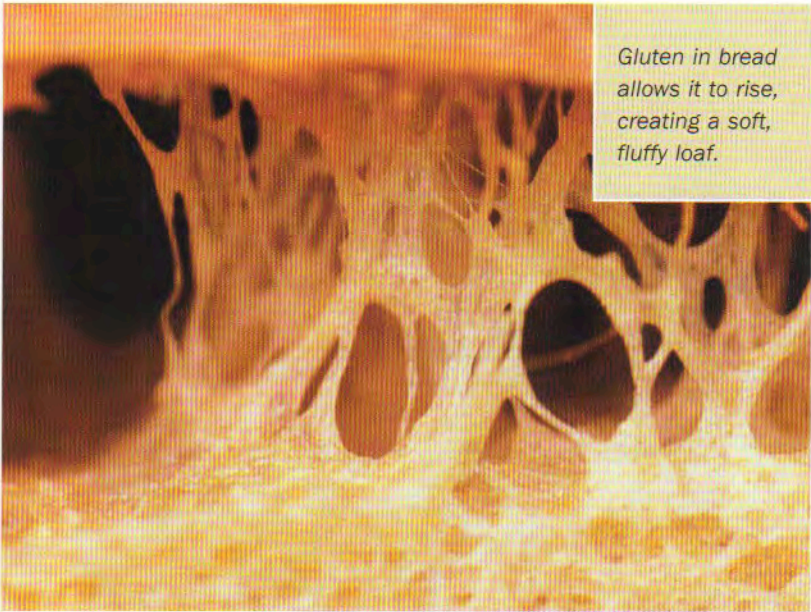
While commercial bakeries are able to control temperatures easily, it can be difficult when baking bread at home, and each batch of bread might vary based on the conditions of the day. "On really warm

summer days, my bread seems to jump up in the bowl in about half the time of a bread-baking day in the winter," Gillen says. "Add some humidity to the day, and you've got the perfect conditions for bread rising.

"Be patient if it's a cold day," she continues. "I set my bread to rise on the stove top, after I've turned the oven on. Enough heat from the vent seems to make the dough happy. Some people turn their oven on a very low temperature for a few minutes and then turn it off and stick the dough in."

Finally, oven temperature when baking the bread influences the final result. "In general, heat causes gas to expand, moisture to evaporate, fats to melt, starches to gelatinize, proteins to solidify, and sugars to caramelize," Bilderback says. "Depending on what type of bread you are making, you can control how fast those things happen by the oven temperature. For instance, sweet dough loaves should bake a little slower. The high sugar content can easily burn a crust.

"Large loaves need time for the heat to penetrate," she says. "If they bake too fast, the crust will be overdone before the dough in the middle is even warmed. Crisp-crust dough, like baguette dough, needs very high heat to expand the gas fast and stretch the skin thin before the proteins solidify. Steam is used to help that process along, softening the outer skin to allow more stretch and thinning."



Gluten in bread allows it to rise, creating a soft, fluffy loaf.

IAN LEONARD/ALAMY

The Equipment

When baking bread the old-fashioned way, all you really need are the ingredients, a big mixing bowl and sturdy loaf pans. "That's the beauty of bread-making," Lorenzetti says. "After all, human beings have been making bread in some form for millennia, so all you really need are the most basic of tools."

If you plan to do a lot of breadmaking, a few additional tools can make the job easier, more educational and maybe more fun. Kaylor recommends getting a baking stone, a digital scale and a library card. She places a baking stone in the oven during the pre-heating process and allows it to heat for about 30 minutes before putting the bread into the oven to bake. "The heat of the stone remains even underneath the bread, helping to achieve a nice final rise for the bread without uneven heat," she says. "The stone will help the bread bake up evenly in color and texture."

PADSTOW HWC/ALAMY



top 12 baking necessities

Here are some of the basic breadmaking tools you'll need to get started, plus some that will take your baking to the next level.



... **MIXING BOWL**
plastic, glass, metal or wood



... **SPOON**
for mixing dough by hand

ROLLING PIN
for rolling out dough



... **TIMER**
for timing during baking, rising and fermenting



BREAD PANS
These come in numerous shapes and styles.



... **BOARD**
a clean surface for kneading by hand

High temperatures and steam help form a crunchy crust on sourdough and baguettes.

STAND MIXER

for easy mixing of dough and ingredients



THERMOMETER
for gauging when a loaf is done



SCALE
for precise measurement of flour and ingredients



POT HOLDER
protection for your hands when pulling hot loaves from the oven!



DUTCH OVEN
for baking no-knead bread



BAKING STONE
for superb pizza crust and flat breads

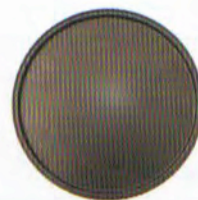




IMAGE: BROKER/ALAMY

Rising dough will look pock-marked, smell yeasty and double in size.

A digital scale can help you make more precise measurements. “In the summer, when humidity is high, flour retains more moisture, while the dry air of winter will have the same cup of flour weigh less,” Kaylor says. “Using a scale helps balance things in the baker’s favor. Unlike cooking, which allows for tasting and adjusting, baking is precise and scientific. A scale increases the chances for success but also the likelihood of recreating that success.”

With a library card, home bakers can locate lots of baking resources. “Reading through a handful of bread-based cookbooks will help new bakers get an idea about what can go wrong, how to know when you’re on the right track and how recipes should look and feel,” Kaylor continues. “Once you have the basics down, it’s easier to figure out why a recipe worked so well or why your bread resembled a paperweight instead of a farmhouse loaf.”

Amendt recommends getting a pastry board or a large wooden or acrylic board that you can dedicate specifically for kneading and rolling bread dough to avoid contamination from bacteria or the transfer of strong flavors like garlic and onions. Also, “if you plan to do a lot of bread baking, a heavy-duty stand mixer can make the job a lot faster and easier,” she says.

For Cauldwell, a rolling pin, timer and oven gloves are must-haves to make the job of bread making easier. If you want to cut out some of the steps of traditional breadmaking, a bread machine can be handy. Lorenzetti says bread machines often appear at garage sales or in the basements or attics of family members and friends.

While homemade bread is now viewed as complex and a special treat, the act of breadmaking once was a simple, daily task for homemakers everywhere. “I think people think that breadmaking is difficult, but really it is one of the most basic human skills,” Lorenzetti says. “Making your own bread is a step toward sustainable living that everyone can take, and the risk is pretty low. I’ve never made a failed batch of bread that was totally inedible.”

“Many people think that making homemade bread takes a lot of work and time, but the majority of the time spent making bread is allowing the bread to rise,” Kaylor adds. “During this time, people can easily do other things, making it far more convenient than people might think.”

When you add breadmaking to your list of weekly chores, you begin to take part in an ancient process of healthy eating and caring for your family. Easier than it sounds, the process creates delicious, healthy products that can be more satisfying than you ever thought possible. pk

Freelance journalist Nancy Mann Jackson writes regularly about gardening, preserving and cooking homegrown produce, and she blogs at GrowingFoodandKids.com. Contact her through her website: NancyJackson.com