

"Bread baking is simple"

BY SALLY BAIR
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LEBANON — With winter now in full, blustery force, it is the perfect time to fill your cozy home with the aroma of freshly baked bread. You'll be a heroine to your family when they find the taste is as good as the smell.

Alletta Schadler, Lebanon County extension home economist, offered tips this week to would-be bread bakers, designed to be helpful to the beginner as well as the experienced baker.

Schadler said, "Bread baking is very simple." Basic ingredients include yeast and something to feed the yeast, usually sugar, salt which controls the rate at which yeast rises; and flour.

Since yeast is a living thing, Schadler pointed out that if the liquid added during the mixing process is too hot it will kill the yeast or cause the dough to rise too fast which will result in its collapse. If the temperature of the liquid is too low, nothing will happen, because the yeast will not have been activated.

Yeast should be dissolved in water which is slightly warm on the wrist, and a warmed crockery bowl is best to do the mixing in. If a recipe calls for yeast mixed with the flour, water can be used which feels hot to the arm.

Active dry yeast is the most commonly used yeast, but compressed yeast can also be used. Compressed yeast has a short shelf life, and although it can be frozen, it must be used once it is thawed.

Mixing the dough properly is very important to the overall success of the bread, according to Schadler. She explained that the protein in wheat flour gets long and stringy which accounts for the bread dough's rising. It is very important to use flour that has gluten, and to handle the dough in such a way as to develop the gluten. "Gluten acts to trap gas bubbles released by the yeast, thus causing the rising effect."

Dough should be mixed the full amount of time specified in the recipe, and kneading should also be done to the maximum stated time. The mixing and the kneading develops the gluten which will aid in the rising process.

With the many kinds of flour now available, it may be a mystery to a novice how to go about purchasing flour for bread baking. Schadler pointed out that all-purpose flour is good for any kind of bread. Bread flour, now readily available, contains more gluten than regular all-purpose flour, so gives a more springy loaf. "It does a very nice job," says Schadler. "You do not need as much bread flour."

Occident flour, a brand name, has some barley flour added, and also does a nice job with bread. It, too, has a higher gluten content than all-purpose flour.

Whole wheat flour, or graham flour, can be used in any recipe which calls for all-purpose flour, and will give a heavier, more moist

loaf. It can be substituted cup for cup in a recipe.

Many other kinds of flour are available, including buckwheat and rye, which add flavor and nutrition, but which have no gluten. Schadler cautions, "Don't try to make a loaf of rye bread without using some wheat flour. It won't do anything." She says at least one half the amount of flour should be in wheat flour, and the more the shift in proportion the heavier the loaf will be.

Schadler also cautioned, "When buying specialty bread the consumer should try to purchase from stores which have a volume of business because wheat flour can get rancid, since the wheat germ oil is still in it."

Another tip she offered is, "Don't bother wasting time sifting flour for bread. Most recipes call for an approximately measure. Go by how it feels. Different flours absorb moisture at different rates, depending upon what kind of flour it is, how old it is and other conditions."

In kneading the dough, Schadler comments "Don't use a lot of flour; knead it as moist as possible. Develop a rhythm as you work." She points out that whole wheat and rye dough will feel different from white dough.

Rising times are important, but Schadler said that most doughs need to rise an hour to double in bulk, the requirement for the first rising. The second rising time will be shorter, and smaller pieces of dough will require shorter rising times.

If you are interrupted in the rising process, Schadler pointed out that it is possible to punch down the dough and let it rise again more than one time. However, she added that there is a limit to the number of times this can be done and still have a successful product. Rather, she suggested punching the dough down, refrigerating it for several hours or overnight, then bringing it to room temperature and proceeding with the recipe.

The shortening in the dough is important in increasing the "keeping" ability of the bread, but the type of shortening used is personal preference. Lard, butter and shortening may impart a different flavor, and butter or margarine could cause some difficulty in a recipe which doesn't specify them as the shortening because of the "liquid fraction" when they are melted.

Schadler pointed out that it is sometimes easier to work with the dough if it is allowed to rest for a short period after it has been punched down. She also said that bread should be shaped into loaves the same width as the pan for the most successful and most attractive loaf. Bread pans should be half full of dough before the second rising to obtain the best appearance.

To check bread for doneness, the bread should be removed from the pan and tapped lightly on the

bottom. A hollow sound indicates it is finished. Brushing the top of a loaf with butter while hot will make a soft crust.

Schadler demonstrated a "triple braided loaf" which includes white, rye and whole wheat dough, and can be made either on a cookie sheet or in a pan. She said, "It has a delightful texture, and can be sliced very thin and keeps very well."

The recipe follows. It makes an attractive brunch loaf, and offers the experience of working with three different doughs and three different flavors.

THREE-COLOR BRAIDED LOAF
2 packages active dry yeast
2 1/2 cup warm water (110 degrees)

2 1/2 cup all-purpose flour

1 T salt

2 T honey

4 T soft margarine

1 cup all-purpose flour

Whole Wheat:

2 T molasses

2 T wheat germ

1 1/2 cup whole wheat flour

Rye:

2 T cocoa

1 1/2 teaspoons caraway seed

1 1/2 cup rye flour

2 T molasses

White: 1 1/2 cup all-purpose flour

Dissolve yeast in water in large

mixer bowl. Stir in other main

batter ingredients. Beat to blend,

beat 4 minutes on medium speed.

Scrape bowl often. Add 1 more cup

flour. Beat on high for 4 more minutes. Divide batter into thirds - about 1 1/4 cups each and put in 3 bowls and treat as follows.

For Whole Wheat Dough - add molasses, wheat germ and whole wheat flour. Stir to mix. Turn out onto board and knead until smooth - add all-purpose flour as needed to prevent sticking. Put in greased bowl to raise until doubled in bulk.

Pumpernickle Dough - add molasses, cocoa, caraway seed and rye flour. Knead until smooth. Add all-purpose flour as needed. Place in greased bowl to rise and double in bulk.

White Dough - to last bowl, add remaining 1 1/2 cup all-purpose

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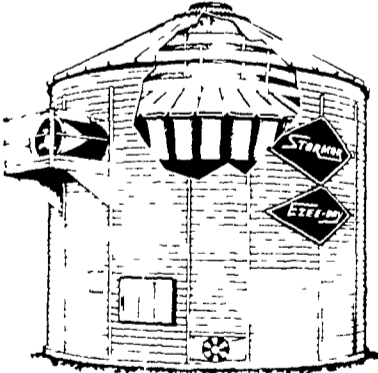
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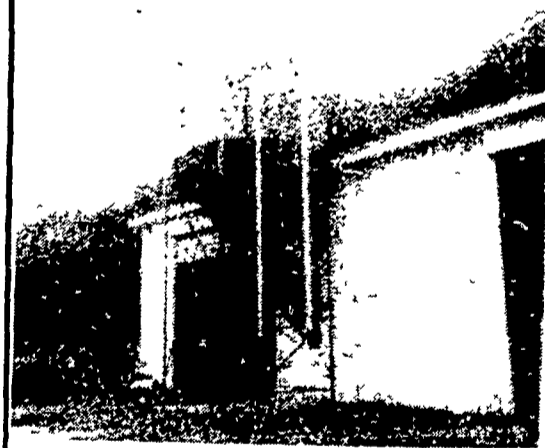
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