

bread . book
mary lynn coulson
spring 2011

We live in an age of technology and speed. Information is only a click away with the internet always available. We love fast food and fast cars, and get impatient when a friend doesn't text us back immediately.

But if my four years as an Environmental Studies major and liberal arts student has taught me anything, it's that we need to question our common sense. Just because Facebook and microwavable Pop Tarts and coal-powered electricity seem normal, does that make them good?

I set out to question the good in eating, and focused on bread. As a suburban kid growing up in a "normal" American family, my habit is to buy bread from the grocery store when I need it, and I usually don't think twice about it.

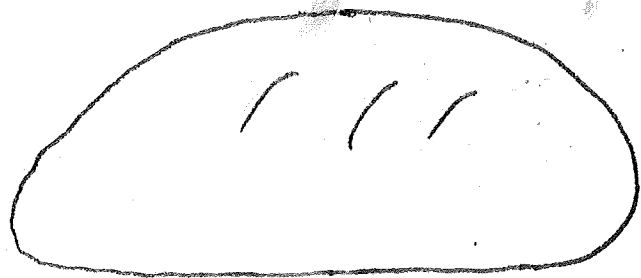
But there's something poetic about the process of measuring and mixing the flour, water, yeast, etc; something appealing about kneading the dough; something magical about seeing it rise to twice its size (the yeast is alive!); and something glorious about warm bread right out of the oven, slathered with butter. I lose all of this when I buy the packaged stuff from the store.

Wendell Berry would call it the "pleasures of eating."

Instead of turning to the internet to teach me how to bake bread, I turned to my friends. Food (especially bread, I find) has a knack for bringing people together (I might call it the pleasures of baking, the pleasures of friendship, the pleasures of good conversation, and the pleasures of slowing down). I asked five different people in my community to teach me a bread recipe that means something to them, and this is what I came up with. A journal, a how-to book, a cookbook—a record of bread experiments and meaningful friendships.

This book is for me, but I'll gladly share it with you. But instead of using it as a cookbook, use it as inspiration—go ask your mom/friend/coworker/neighbor/farmer to teach you how to bake bread (or how to roast beets, how to grow kale, how to can tomatoes). Trust me. You won't regret it.

As the wise Wendell Berry once said, "When going back makes sense, you are going ahead."



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Kirsten
Irish soda bread

On a sunny weekend afternoon, I made my way down Ole Ave to meet my dear friend Kirsten at her house. As we gathered bowls and ingredients and measuring cups, we talked about Ireland, and our family heritage, and about our moms.

"This bread is supposed to look lumpy, and the dough will be sticky. It tastes tangy and sweet!"

She told me about St. Patrick's Day at her home and how her mom makes this recipe along with (Kirsten) every year. Growing up, Kirsten wanted to learn how to make it, a recipe passed down from her Grandma Clark (who is 100% Irish).

"I can't have St. Patrick's Day without soda bread - they're synonymous."

This recipe is good to share, and you should make a lot - Kirsten told me that it's gone in a day when she makes it at school (and when we made it, it was gone even quicker!).

(a hint: it's best eaten fresh out of the oven with butter melted on top, but it has a whole stick of butter in it so you don't really need butter...)

4 cups unsifted flour
1/2 cup sugar
1/4 tsp baking soda
2 tsp baking powder
1/2 tsp salt
2 eggs
1 1/2 cups buttermilk
1 stick butter

Mix dry ingredients in large bowl. Add butter. Blend with your hands. Beat eggs in separate bowl. Add buttermilk and blend well. Pour egg/buttermilk mixture, a little at a time, into dry mix. Dust hands with flour and mold dough into round. Put in a 9" round pan. Cut cross on top. Bake at 350° for one hour.

Scott Sourdough bread

Scott and I took Campus Ecology together freshman year, so we've always had great conversations about food and environmentalism and culture. Making this recipe took a few installments, since the dough rises overnight. But sourdough is amazing! The starter we used came from Oregon, from John Linton (the guy who taught Scott this recipe), and can be kept alive just by adding equal parts flour and water every week or so.

The best part of this bread are the smells - the sharp, tangy smell of the starter in the glass jar, and the yeasty-sour whiffs when you open the oven. Making sourdough is a skill, and I learned a lot. Plus we had some fun along the way (duh).

- 1 cup starter
- 300 ml water
- 2 tsp salt
- 1 cup whole wheat flour
- 3 cups white flour

Mix all ingredients together and let it sit in a warm, airtight container overnight. Repeat above steps (without adding more starter).

Knead until dough doesn't stick to your hands or the counter.

Let rise for 2 hours.

Knead into 2 loaves and let sit for another hour or so.

Place on cookie sheet with cornmeal. Bake at 450° for 45 minutes.

(these steps are guidelines, not strict rules)

Molly pumpkin bread

As the sounds of Billie Holiday and Joni Mitchell floated around the kitchen and the rain fell in sheets outside, Molly shared her baking secrets with me.

"The secret to quick bread is to warm up the fruit you're using - pumpkin, zucchini - in the oven. It makes everything mix together perfectly."

A recipe that comes from her mom and grandmother before her, I can say with confidence that this is the best pumpkin bread I've ever had. And the conversation was equally enriching: we talked siblings, faith, parents and marriage while the bread baked.

A beautiful evening, all in all.

(a hint: Molly sometimes makes this into a triple ginger pumpkin bread, by adding candied ginger, dried ginger, and fresh shaved ginger. yum!)

1 1/2 cups flour	1/2 tsp baking soda
1 1/2 tsp cinnamon	1/3 cup skim milk
1 tsp ginger	1/2 tsp vanilla
1/2 tsp nutmeg	6 T butter
1/4 tsp cloves	1 1/3 cups brown sugar
1 tsp salt	2 eggs
1 tsp baking powder	1 cup pumpkin, warmed

(chocolate chips, walnuts)

Preheat oven to 350°. Grease 2 small loaf pans. Whisk together dry ingredients. Cream butter and sugar. Add eggs, one at a time. Blend in pumpkin and vanilla. Alternate adding flour mixture and milk until blended. Fold in nuts and pour in pans. Bake 1 hour, let cool in pans for 15 minutes, then transfer to wire racks.

Laura
no-knead bread

This recipe was passed down to Laura from a good friend, and then she passed it on to me. It is honestly the simplest bread I've ever made - it took about three minutes to mix the ingredients together, and then sat overnight, then a few more steps and voila! Delicious, no-knead bread.

It's good for sandwiches, dipping in olive oil, etc. "The outside gets crusty while the inside stays soft and fluffy and white," Laura told me, in between chatting with housemates and visitors.

I love hanging out with Laura, and I'll use any excuse I can to spend some time with her. ☺

3 cups all-purpose flour
1/4 tsp instant yeast
1 1/4 tsp salt
cornmeal / wheat bran
as needed.

① In large bowl mix flour, yeast, salt. Add 1 5/8 cup water. Stir until blended. Cover bowl with plastic and let rise at least 12 hours at room temp.

② Dough is ready when surface is dotted with bubbles. Place dough on floured work surface; turn over and cover loosely with plastic wrap. Let rest 15 minutes.

③ With floured hands, gently and quickly shape dough into a ball. Generously coat a cotton towel with flour or cornmeal; put dough seam side down on towel and dust with flour. Cover with another cotton towel and let rise for 2 hours. When ready, dough will be more than double in size.

④ At least 30 mins before dough is ready, heat oven to 450°. Put a 6-8 quart heavy covered pot in oven as it heats. When dough is ready, remove pot from oven. Slide hand under towel and turn dough over into pot, seam side up. Cover with lid and bake 30 minutes, then remove lid and bake another 15-30 minutes until loaf is beautifully browned. Cool on a rack.

emily honey whole wheat

Emily graduated from otag last year, and we've bonded over this recipe before. It's from the first "Recipes for change" cookbook, and it's divine. I've baked it before, but had such a great time making it with Emily that I just had to include it in this book. As I fretted about washing dishes, making lunch, and baking bread all at one time, Emily reminded me of why we were there in the first place: each other.

While she isn't so close at hand these days (since she lives in a different state now), she's still a part of my community, and this recipe represents that.

Warm up the following ingredients in a saucepan:

- 1 1/4 cups milk
- 1 3/4 cups water
- 1/2 cup honey
- 2 Tbsp vegetable oil

combine the following in a mixing bowl:

- 3 cups whole wheat flour
- 1 Tbsp salt
- 2 Tbsp active dry yeast

Pour warm (not hot) liquids over dry mix. Beat for 3 minutes with a fork.

Mix in:

- 1 additional cup whole wheat flour
- 4 cups white flour

knead 5 minutes, adding more white flour if necessary. Place in a greased bowl, turn once to coat, and let rise in a warm place until doubled in size (about an hour). Punch down dough, divide in half, and place in 2 greased loaf pans. Cover and let rise for 40-45 minutes. Bake at 375° for 30-40 minutes.