

Big Red Bread

Ingredients: 1 tbsp yeast
3 tbsp sugar
1 tbsp salt
2 cups warm (~100°F) water, not too hot or it will kill the yeast
5 cups all-purpose flour
3 tbsp cooking oil

Mixing Instructions:

1. Add the yeast, sugar, salt and warm water to a mixing bowl. Allow to sit until the yeast wakes up and starts to form a foam in the solution.
2. Add the flour and cooking oil and mix until smooth and satiny. The dough will be about the same texture (slightly tacky) as a warm leather car seat in the summertime, but should leave the bowl cleanly. If it is too dry, add a tsp of water at a time and work in. If it is too wet, add 1tbsp of flour at a time and work in.
3. Remove the dough to the counter and knead for 3-5 minutes (push down, fold over, repeat). This can also be accomplished in a stand mixer or bread machine.
4. Spray the bowl and return the dough, cover with a towel and let sit for about an hour. The dough is ready when it has doubled in size. The cooler the air, the longer it will take. This can also be done in the refrigerator overnight.
5. Follow the instructions below for your desired final product.

Basic bread

Divide the dough into four piles and place in four bread pans or two large cast iron skillets. Allow to rise again until double and bake at 375°F in the middle oven rack until golden brown.

Alternatives:

Replace two cups of AP flour with wheat or rye flour. Further one can add 1 cup of sunflower seeds and Italian seasoning to the dough or roll in rolled oats.

Replace one cup of flour with two cups of mashed potatoes.

Experiment with changing temperatures and second rise times to make dough fluffier or chewier; or crustier vs. softer.

Sourdough

After making the dough, place a quarter of it in a sealed container or baggie in the back of the refrigerator for 2-3 weeks until it starts to smell a little funny. Make a standard recipe and add the soured dough to the water/yeast/sugar/salt mixture. Continue with the rest of the recipe as written. This works great for pretzels, bread bowls, rolls and loaves of bread.

Rolls

Divide the dough into 35-40 balls a little larger than a golf ball. Place in a 8-10 into a pie or cake tin or 10-15 into a large cast iron skillet. allow to rise again until double and bake at 375°F in the middle oven rack until golden brown.

French toast

Take the basic bread made from above on a previous day and cut into 1-1 ½" slices. Mix together 2 eggs, 1 cup of milk, a pinch of salt, 1 tsp of vanilla, 2 tbsp sugar and 1 tsp cinnamon. Dip the bread slices into the egg mixture and let it soak for a few seconds before placing on a medium temperature skillet or pan. Cook until lightly browned on both sides and add your favorite syrup or experiment with making your own from fresh fruits like blueberries or peaches with granulated sugar, butter and spices like nutmeg and cinnamon.

Bread pudding

Cube the previously made basic bread into ½-¾" pieces. Soak in 2 eggs, 1 cup of heavy cream, a pinch of salt, 1 tsp of vanilla, 2 tbsp sugar, 1 tsp cinnamon and raisin or other dried fruit. Place in baking tins or ramakins and bake at 350°F until firm. Top with caramel sauce made by heating 1 stick of butter or margarine with 2 cups of granulated sugar and 2 tbsp cream until orange-brown.

Bread sticks

Break off pieces of dough that are the size of a tennis ball. Roll into logs about 8-10" long and place on a greased baking sheet. Allow to rise until double, brush with melted butter and sprinkle with grated parmesan cheese, garlic powder and parsley. Bake at 375°F until golden brown.

Cheesy bread sticks

Roll dough out into a flat sheet about ½-¾" thick. Cut into strips about 1" wide, but leave them together. Melt 1 stick of butter or margarine. Brush with melted butter. Sprinkle with garlic powder, Italian seasoning and granulated parmesan cheese. Sprinkle generously with mozzarella cheese. Allow to rise until double and bake at 375°F until the cheese begins to lightly brown.

Pizza (Calzones and Strombolis)

Split the dough into four sections for pan pizza or six sections for thin crust. Roll the dough into sheets to fit your greased or sprayed pizza pan or baking sheet. Add your favorite sauce, cheese(s) and toppings. Bake on bottom rack for 10 minutes at 375°F and then finish on the top rack until cheese begins to brown. Personal pizzas can be made with a 6" pan or try using a cast iron skillet greased with butter for great variation. For a calzone or Stromboli, fold the pizza in half with (calzone) or without (Stromboli) the sauce before baking.

Pita bread

Divide dough into 20-25 tennis ball sized balls. Roll dough outward from the center until flat and about ⅛" thick. Allow to rise slightly to create air pockets. Heat a skillet or cast iron pan until water will sizzle immediately when a few drops are added (medium-high, around 400-425°F). Place the pita rounds on the skillet for around 30 seconds until it forms blisters that turn dark brown on the bottom. Flip and continue to cook until both sides are evenly done. Often, the two sides will blow up like a balloon. Remove and allow to cool. Alternatively, the bread can be baked at 425°F on a sheet pan.

Pigs in a blanket

Rip off a piece of dough about the size of a tennis ball and stretch or roll it into a log 7-9 inches long and not more than ½" thick. Wrap in a spiral around hot dogs or cooked sausage links. Place on a baking sheet and bake at 375°F until golden brown. Serve with fondue, mustard or your favorite topping/dip.

Bread bowls

Take about half of the bread dough and place in a cast iron skillet or 8-9" cake/pie pan. Allow to rise until doubled and bake at 350°F until golden. Cut down from the top about an inch away from the edge around in a circle most of the way through the bread. Remove the center portion to make a bowl. Fill the bowl with crab dip, chicken alfredo, beef stew or another thick, hearty meal.

Cinnamon rolls

Roll the dough out until it is around ¼" thick and twice as wide as it is long. Spread a stick of melted butter or margarine across the whole dough sheet. Evenly spread ½ cup of sugar, ½ cup of brown sugar and 2 tbsp of cinnamon over the butter. Starting in one corner and working from left to right or right to left, roll the dough, one twist at a time until you have the typical spiral of a cinnamon roll. Cut across the roll in 1-2" intervals and place in a cake pan or cookie sheet. Cover and allow to rise for about an hour on the counter or overnight in the fridge. Bake at 350°F until lightly golden brown. Top with your favorite icing or use the one below. Makes 24-48 cinnamon rolls.

For icing: Mix 2 tbsp of softened butter or margarine, 2 cups of 10X (confectioner's) sugar, 2 tbsp milk and 1 tsp vanilla until smooth. Alternatively, replace butter with 4 oz of softened cream cheese for cream cheese icing. Alternative two, replace the milk with 4 tbsp sour cream for sour cream icing.

Monkey Bread

Cut the dough into nickel-sized pieces. Roll each ball in melted butter or margarine and then in cinnamon sugar (1 cup granulated sugar to 1 tsp cinnamon). Layer the dough balls in a Bundt pan or cake pan. After each layer, sprinkle ¼ cup of semisweet chocolate chips across the layer. Bake at 350°F until golden brown. For extra gooey monkey bread, drizzle ½ cup of maple syrup over the bread before baking. Alternatively, make a syrup by melting together 2 cups of sugar, 1 stick of butter or margarine, 1 tsp vanilla and the zest from two large oranges. Place the plain bread dough balls, one layer at a time, into the pan and pour the syrup over the top. Add a few white chocolate chips and, if you prefer, some dried cranberries. Repeat for 1-2 more layers. Another alternative uses blueberries (frozen or fresh) in place of the oranges from the previous syrup and either dried or fresh cherries or strawberries in place of the chips.

Bagels

Rip off a piece of dough about the size of a tennis ball and stretch or roll it into a log 7-9 inches long. Pinch the two ends together to make a loop that looks a lot like a doughnut. Immediately place the bagel into a pot of boiling water. Boil for 60-90 seconds, drip dry and place on a baking sheet. Place into a 400°F oven and bake until lightly golden.

Doughnuts

Use a large cup or doughnut cutter to make the round shapes. You can use a bottle cap or other small, round tool to make the hole. Not cutting a hole allows for filled doughnuts. Place the doughnuts on a greased or sprayed sheet of aluminum foil, cut slightly larger than the doughnut itself. Allow to rise for about an hour or until they float when placed in the cooking oil. Heat a deep pot filled with 2-3 inches of cooking oil until between 350-375°F. Gently flip over the doughnut into the hot oil, allowing it to slide into the oil without plopping. When side 1 is lightly golden in color, flip over and allow to cook on the second side. Remove cooked doughnuts to a cooling rack or paper towel. Alternatively, cut the dough into 2x5" planks to make long johns or shorter planks to make beignets.

For glaze: melt together ½ cup of milk, 2 cups of 10X (confectioner's) sugar and 2 tbsp corn syrup. Bring to a simmer and remove from heat. Dip doughnuts while warm and return to the cooling rack to drip.

For chocolate ganache (for iced tops): melt together 2 cups semisweet chocolate chips, 1 stick of butter or margarine, 1 cup of 10X sugar and 2 tbsp corn syrup.

For white creme filling: 1 cup of marshmallow fluff, 2 cups of confectioner's sugar, 2 tbsp milk and 1 tsp vanilla. Can be piped into the cooled doughnut with a zipper baggie or icing bag. Simply use a knife to cut from the edge of the doughnut toward the center and then wiggle back and forth to open any space in the middle before adding filling.

Other fillings could be jelly or pudding, the icing from the cinnamon rolls can be used to cover the tops and you can add nuts, sprinkles, etc. as you like.

Pretzels

For standard shapes, rip off a piece of dough about the size of a tennis ball. Roll or stretch the dough into 10-15 inch strands that are around ½" thick. Practice twisting and flipping the pretzel to get the classic shape that was developed by monks to represent a person with his/her arms folded as if praying. Around twice keeping the twists near the open ends and fold them back over to the looped end. Place pretzels 2-3 at a time in a pot of boiling water that has ⅔ cup of baking soda for each gallon of water. Remove to a baking sheet and sprinkle with pretzel salt or kosher salt to your desired amount. Place into an oven at 425°F until medium brown for chewy soft pretzels or wait until it is darker brown for a crunchy pretzel. Alternatively, cut the rolled dough into logs about 4-6" long and ½" thick to make pretzel sticks (great plain or for crab dip or cheese fondue)