

Maple-Oatmeal Bread

*From Tinky's blog, **In Our Grandmothers' Kitchens***

Ingredients:

1 cup old-fashioned oats (do not use quick or steel cut)
2 cups boiling water
1 tablespoon butter
1 packet (about 2-1/4 teaspoons) active dry yeast (not instant)
1/4 cup lukewarm water
1/2 cup maple syrup
2 teaspoons salt
5-1/2 cups unbleached, all-purpose flour (more or less)

Instructions:

Place the oats in a large mixing bowl. Pour the boiling water over them, add the butter, and let the oatmeal stand for about 15 minutes, until it is lukewarm. After the first 10 minutes, place the yeast in a small bowl. Cover it with the lukewarm water. Allow it to bubble up for a few minutes.

When the oatmeal is lukewarm, stir in the maple syrup, the salt, the yeast with its water, and 2 cups of the flour. Stir vigorously; then add 2 cups more flour. Stir again vigorously for a minute or two; get as close to beating as you can with a mixture this heavy. Scoop up the dough (add a bit of flour if it won't hold together to scoop), and place it on a kneading surface—a floured board or a silicone mat.

Knead the dough for 2 minutes, adding a little more flour to keep it from sticking to the surface and your hands. After those first 2 minutes, let the dough rest for up to 10 minutes; then resume kneading, adding more flour as needed. Knead for 5 to 10 minutes, until the dough feels smooth.

Place the dough in a large, greased bowl. Cover the bowl with a warm, damp dish towel. Let the dough rise until it doubles in bulk; this should take about 2 hours, depending on how warm the room is. If your towel dries out during the rising, be sure to dampen it again.

Remove the covering from the bowl, and punch down on the dough once with your fist. This lets out a lot of the air. (It's also fun.) Cut the dough in half, and shape each half into a ball. Butter 2 bread pans, and shape each ball into an oval about the same size as your pans. Smooth the balls as well as you can with your hands.

Place the bread loaves in the buttered pans, and turn them over so that both the tops and the bottoms have touched the butter. Cover the pans with a damp towel as you did the rising bowl, and allow the loaves to rise again until they double in bulk. This should take a little less time than the first rising, perhaps an hour or so.

After 45 minutes, preheat the oven to 375 degrees. When the loaves have finished rising, uncover them, and bake them for about 40 to 45 minutes, until they are a warm brown color and sound hollow when you tap on them. Remove the hot loaves from the pans, and let them cool on racks. Makes 2 loaves.