

Crusty Almost No-Knead Bread



Merilyn Simonds, 2012 Springsong Guest Author, writes: “After writing ruined my wrists, I turned to this easy, delicious bread that requires almost no kneading yet is as good as any artisanal bakery loaf.” The recipe comes from *Cook’s Illustrated* magazine, the authority on tested recipes and techniques. They discovered that 1 Tbsp white vinegar and 3 oz mild-flavoured lager, added to the dough with less water (1¼ cups instead of 1⅝), gives the bread a more complex, tangy flavour.

INGREDIENTS

3 CUPS all-purpose or bread flour, more for dusting (or 2 cups white and 1 cup brown flour)

¼ TSP instant yeast (½ tsp active dry yeast)

1½ TSP table salt

1⅝ CUPS water

MAKES 1 LOAF

METHOD

In a large bowl, whisk flour, yeast, and salt together. Add water and with a rubber spatula, stir briskly until a shaggy ball forms. (The amount depends on local humidity.) Cover bowl with plastic wrap and let dough rise 12 to 18 hours, in a warm place—inside an oven with the light on.

Dough is ready when the surface is bubbly. Scrape the dough out of the bowl, onto a lightly floured work surface. Sprinkle with a little more flour and knead lightly, 5-10 turns, until it forms a springy ball.

Lay a long sheet of parchment paper inside a clean bowl. Place in the dough, seam-side down, so the paper overhangs opposite sides to create “handles.” Oil the top of the dough and cover with a cotton towel. Let rise for about 2 hours, until doubled.

Preheat oven to 500°F. Adjust the rack to its lowest position and place a 6- to 8-quart heavy, lidded pot (cast iron, enamel, Pyrex or ceramic) in the oven as it heats. For a truly crusty loaf, put a pan of water on the bottom of the oven.

When dough is ready and oven is hot, carefully remove the heated pot from the oven. Using the parchment “handles,” transfer the risen dough from the bowl to the heated pot. Lightly flour the top of the dough, then with a sharp knife, make one long cut, about a half-inch deep. Immediately cover the pot, place in the oven, and reduce the temperature to 425°F.

Bake covered for 30 minutes, then remove lid and bake 20 to 30 minutes, until loaf is brown. Thumped lightly, it will sound hollow—remarkably like the spring drumming of a grouse. Carefully lift bread from pot and cool on a rack.

