

PLAIN BREAD

[Reproduced courtesy of JHR, aka The Warlock]

This bread is 'plain' only in that it contains only the basic ingredients for classic bread; the kind Roman soldiers lived on, and that is referred to in '...our daily bread.' The bread is absolutely delicious.

Ingredients:

1½ Cup lukewarm (+/- 105° F) water

2 tsp granulated sugar

1 ½ tsp dry yeast granules

3½ Cup unbleached all-purpose flour

1 tsp salt

Preparation:

In a large bowl, add yeast and sugar to water. Mix thoroughly until yeast is dissolved. Add 1 cup flour. Mix thoroughly until all lumps have dissolved. Set aside in warm place (70° F, about). Let this sponge work until bubbles appear over the surface. (about 2 hours)

Measure 2 cups of flour. Add salt to the measure and mix thoroughly. Pour mixture into the sponge in the bowl. Mix until all the flour is absorbed. Add final 1 cup of flour and hand mix/knead it into the bread. This is not easy, and will take time & effort. It may not absorb all the flour, depending on season. The dough should by now be very stiff, but elastic, smooth, with a sheen.

Form into a ball and put it into a clean Pyrex bowl. Cover with a damp cloth, arranging cloth so that dough may be observed. Put aside in a warm place, and let rise until doubled in bulk (about 1 hour, depending).

When dough has risen, turn out onto a clean, dry surface to form the loaf. With minimal amount of handling, form into a round-ended cylinder about 4 times as long as it is thick. Sprinkle a thin coat of cornmeal on a baking sheet and center the loaf on the sheet.

Put aside in the warm place to proof until the loaf has doubled in bulk. When risen, apply a thin coat of olive oil to exposed surface of loaf. (not on bottom)

About 15 minutes before loaf is ready for the oven, locate the top rack at mid level. Set oven to 400° F. and preheat for 15 minutes. When oven is ready, center baking

sheet on the mid-level rack. Bake for 20 minutes, then look at it. BEWARE: there will be a rush of superheated air when oven door is opened. Duck before opening or it will fog your spectacles. Loaf should be a medium tan color and sound hollow when tapped (With a spoon. The loaf is HOT). If not, give it another 5 minutes. Loaf should be very rounded with no sagging. If not, there was not enough flour kneaded in during that step. When loaf cools enough to touch, cut a slice and apply butter, liberally.

ENJOY! Makes one 1-pound loaf. The problem with this bread - it never lasts very long. Try making two loaves next time!