

• SOUR DOUGH LOAF

[TWO LARGE LOAVES]

There is no uncertainty about this sour dough loaf since it is made with store yeast, and its fermentation over a period of several days as well as how high and well it rises can be anticipated beforehand. Not so always with wild yeast spores which are the foundation of the true sour dough starters and sponges.

Nevertheless, this is a fine bread—creamy white on the inside, golden brown on the out, and the pleasant sharpness that comes with a long fermentation.

The sponge can be heard bubbling across a quiet kitchen during the first 2 days of active fermentation, and then it becomes passive and quiet.

INGREDIENTS

Sponge: 1 package dry yeast

1¾ cups bread or all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon salt

1 tablespoon sugar

2½ cups hot tap water (120°–130°)

Dough: 5 to 6 cups bread or all-purpose flour, approximately

3 tablespoons sugar

1 teaspoon salt

1 package dry yeast

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup non-fat dry milk
1 cup hot tap water (120° – 130°)
2 tablespoons margarine or other shortening
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups sponge
(Refrigerate the balance of the sponge for later uses. To replenish fully, add $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups warm water [105° – 115°], $\frac{3}{4}$ cup flour and $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons sugar.)

BAKING PANS

Two large (9 x 5) baking pans, greased or Teflon. If glass pans are used reduce oven heat 25° .

PREPARATION

Sponge

4 or 5 days

Blend yeast, bread or all-purpose flour, salt and sugar in a medium bowl and pour in the water. Stir for 30 seconds. Cover with plastic wrap to retain the moisture, and place in a warm spot (80° – 85°). Stir down each day.

Bake Day

Dough

15 mins.

In a large bowl measure 1 cup of bread or all-purpose flour and stir in sugar, salt, yeast, milk and 1 cup hot tap water. Add the margarine or other shortening and $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups of the sponge.

Beat for 3 minutes at medium-high speed in the electric mixer, or for an equal length of time with a wooden spoon.

Stop the mixer. Stir in the balance of the flour, a half cup at a time, first with the spoon and then by hand. The dough will be a rough, shaggy mass that will clean the sides of the bowl. If the dough continues moist and sticky, sprinkle with flour.

KNEADING

8 mins.

Turn the dough onto a lightly floured work surface—counter top or bread board—and knead with the rhythmic 1-2-3 motion of push-turn-fold. The dough will become smooth and elastic, and feel alive under the hands. Bubbles will rise under the surface of the dough. If the dough should be sticky, sprinkle on small additions of flour. Occasionally break the kneading rhythm by raising the dough above the work surface and throwing it down hard against the table. Knead for 8 minutes (6 minutes under the dough hook).

FIRST RISING

1 hour

Return the dough to the bowl and pat with buttered or greased fingers to keep the surface from crusting. Cover the bowl tightly with plastic wrap. Move to a warm place (80° – 85°) until the dough has risen to

about twice its original volume. It can be judged by how high it creeps up the sides of the bowl. You can test if it has risen by poking a finger in it; the dent will remain.

SHAPING
10 mins.

Punch down the dough with the fingertips and knead for 30 seconds to press out the bubbles. Put the dough on the lightly floured work surface and cut into two equal pieces with a sharp knife. Shape each into a ball, and let rest under a towel for 5 minutes. Form a loaf by pressing a ball of dough into a flat oval, roughly the length of the baking pan. Fold the oval in half, pinch the seam tightly to seal, tuck under the ends, and place in the pan, seam down. Repeat for the second loaf.

SECOND RISING
50 mins.

Return the pans to the warm place, cover with a length of wax paper and leave until loaves have doubled in size. Ideally, the top of the dough should have risen about 1 inch above the level of the edge of the pans.

BAKING
400°
30-40 mins.

Preheat the oven to 400°. Bake the loaves in the oven until they are golden brown and test done. Turn one loaf out of its pan and tap the bottom crust with a forefinger. A hard hollow sound means the bread is baked. If not, return to the oven for an additional 10 minutes. If you wish a darker over-all crust, remove the loaves from the pans during the final 10 minutes of the bake period. Midway in the bake period and again near the end of it, shift the loaves so they are exposed equally to the temperature variations of the oven.

FINAL STEP

Remove bread from the oven. Turn from pans and cool on wire rack. Brush with melted margarine for a softer crust.