

OLD MILWAUKEE RYE BREAD

[TWO TO FOUR LOAVES]

This is a two or three day affair that produces a fine rye loaf. It can be made into 2 large round loaves—good for husky family sandwiches—or 3 or 4 long, slender loaves, best for the buffet.

Under the taut plastic wrap covering the bowl, the sponge will rise and fall as it bubbles to its maximum goodness in approximately 3 days, give or take a few hours. After a day or so, a whiff of the fermented sponge will make manifest the historic connection between the baker and the brewer.

I have made several hundred loaves of this wonderful bread, probably more than any other, and each time I have a warm thought for Bernadine Landsberg of Milwaukee, who sent me the recipe a long time ago.

INGREDIENTS

The sponge: 1 package dry yeast
1½ cups warm water (105°–115°)
2 cups medium rye flour
1 tablespoon caraway seed

All of the sponge
1 package dry yeast
1 cup warm water (105°–115°)
¼ cup molasses
1 tablespoon caraway seed
1 egg, room temperature
1 tablespoon salt

1 cup rye flour

5 to 5½ cups all-purpose flour, approximately

3 tablespoons vegetable shortening

Glaze: 1 egg

1 tablespoon milk

1 tablespoon caraway seed

BAKING SHEET

Baking sheet, greased or Teflon.

PREPARATION

1-3 days

Set the sponge in a large bowl by dissolving yeast in the water. Stir in rye flour. Add caraway seeds. Cover the bowl snugly with plastic wrap so that the sour loses none of its moisture which condenses on the plastic and drops back into the mixture. The dark brown paste will rise and fall as it develops flavor and a delicious aroma. The sponge, which will resemble a wet mash that's too thick to pour and too thin to knead, may be used anytime after 6 hours although the longer the better—up to three days when it will have ceased fermenting.

20 mins.

On bake day, uncover the sponge bowl, sprinkle on the new yeast and add water. Blend well with 25 strokes of a wooden spoon. Add molasses, caraway, egg, salt, rye flour, and about 2 cups of the white flour. Beat till smooth—about 100 strokes. Add shortening. Stir in the balance of the flour, a half cup at a time, first with the spoon and then by hand. The dough should clean the sides of the bowl but it will be sticky due to the rye flour.

KNEADING

5 mins.

Turn the dough out on a floured surface—counter top or bread board. Knead until the dough is smooth. It may help to grease fingers to keep the dough from sticking.

FIRST RISING

1 hour

10 mins.

Return the dough to the large bowl, pat the surface well with butter or shortening and place plastic wrap tightly over the top of the bowl. Put in a warm place (80°-85°) for about 1 hour, or until the dough has doubled in bulk. Punch down and let rise 10 additional minutes.

SHAPING

20 mins.

Divide the dough with a sharp knife. For two round loaves, mold each into a smooth ball and place on the baking sheet. For the long slender loaves, roll out a

long rectangle of dough with a rolling pin. Starting at one long edge, roll tightly and pinch together firmly at the seam. Place these side by side on a baking sheet.

SECOND RISING
40 mins.

Cover the loaves with wax paper supported on glass tumblers so that paper will not touch the dough. Return to the warm place until loaves have doubled in bulk.

BAKING
375°
40 mins.

Preheat oven to 375°. With a sharp razor carefully slash 3 or 4 diagonal cuts on the top of each loaf. Brush the tops with water (for an unglazed crust) or a whole egg mixed with 1 tablespoon of milk for a shiny crust. Sprinkle the moist glaze with caraway seeds.

Bake the loaves in the oven. When tapping the bottom crust yields a hard and hollow sound, they are done. If the loaves appear to be browning too quickly, cover with a piece of foil or brown sack paper.

FINAL STEP

Remove from the oven and allow to cool on metal racks. This bread keeps for at least a week or more and freezes well.