

If there were an Academy Awards for Most Wonderful Kitchen Appliances, breadmakers would get my vote! These versatile machines can turn out any number of baking wonders, and you hardly need to lift a hand. The hardest part is measuring the ingredients.

In the old days, before the invention of this wonder machine, you had to knead and knead, punch down the dough and then after the second rise, knead some more. Although this can be fun, it's a very time consuming project, and time is not something many of us have much of today. If you love freshly baked bread, you must have a breadmaker!

Who doesn't like the smell of freshly baked bread? With the current crop of breadmakers, you can make a loaf of bread, ready to rise dough for a sweet bread to be baked in the oven later, a fruit filled concoction, hamburger bun dough, quick breads, pizza dough or a delectable croissant dough. The abilities of the modern breadmakers are astonishing indeed.

In the old days, bread makers were artisans, devoting years of study and dedicated to the art of making bread. Although there are still bread artisans producing heavenly breads, the average person can't spend the time.

Today, breadmakers are machines, automated yet reliable, ready to produce anything from dough to croissants. Breadmakers offer settings that beep at the right moment, alerting you it's time to add fruit, nuts, cheese, herbs or chili peppers to the dough to make a sweet or spicy bread, all in the amazing breadmaker. Pizza dough is ridiculously easy, and makes a dough that comes out perfect every time.

Breadmakers allow you to toss in your ingredients in 10 minutes flat, and go off to work. When you get home, you've got freshly baked bread. If you're making a dough to be shaped into a loaf and baked in the oven, like cinnamon bread or hamburger buns, it takes only an hour before the dough is ready.

You then remove it from the breadmaker, punch it down, shape into a ball and place it in an oiled bowl. Cover with cheesecloth and place in a warm spot (about 80 degrees - the top of the frig is a good spot) and let it rise again. If you're baking later, you can place the oiled bowl containing the dough in the frig until you're ready to bake. The dough will rise a little, even in the frig, but will need the warmth for a full rise.

You can get creative, experimenting with various additions. Basil and sun-dried tomatoes make a delicious loaf. Try olives and onions.

You'll find conversion charts on the net that tell you how to modify a

conventional bread recipe to one that works in the breadmaker. Last, but not least, think of the money you'll save!