

## Braided Oatmeal Bread

adapted from Cynthia Sheer's *Breads at the Academy*, California Culinary Academy

Yield: 2 or 3 loaves

### Ingredients

- 1 cup rolled oats (either quick cooking, or old-fashioned which have been coarsely chopped)
- 1 ¼ cup boiling water
- ¼ cup warm water
- 1 package active dry yeast (if using jar yeast, use about 2 or 2 ¼ teaspoons)
- 2 tablespoons honey
- ½ cup warm milk
- 1 egg (at room temperature)
- 3 tablespoons butter or oil
- 3 ½ or 4 cups unbleached bread flour
- 2 ½ teaspoons salt
- 1 ½ cups whole-wheat flour
  
- 1 egg (at room temperature)
- 1 table spoon rolled oats
- \* Cooking spray

### Preparation

1. Combine chopped oats and 1 cup boiling water in a medium bowl; let stand.
2. Pour ¼ cup 115° water in the bowl of a stand mixer. If bowl is cold, use hotter water, and once water in bowl is between 105° and 115° add yeast and honey and let stand 5 minutes to activate yeast. In the meantime, add butter (or oil) to oatmeal mixture so that butter softens or melts. Check temperature of oatmeal mixture and, if necessary, heat milk in microwave before adding milk to oatmeal mixture, so that resulting mixture is 115° (or use cold milk if oatmeal mixture to reduce temperature of mixture) Add the 115° oatmeal mixture to yeast mixture; mix with paddle attachment until combined.
3. Fluff bread flour, then re-measure 3 ¼ cups of bread flour by lightly spooning flour into a dry measuring cup and leveling with a knife or other flat object. (After re-measuring, you will probably have leftover. Save this for dusting the pastry board.) Reserve ¼ cup. Add 3 cups bread flour to mixer in ½ cup increments, mixing on low speed until combined, until 3 cups have been added. Beat at medium speed for about 5 minutes until dough becomes smooth and elastic. Then mix in one egg on low speed until well combined.
4. Add the salt to the reserved ¼ cup of bread flour, and mix well with spoon to evenly distribute salt before adding the bread flour and salt mixture to the mixer, mix on low speed until well combined.
5. Switch to dough hook attachment. Using the same technique, fluff and re-measure 1 ½ cups whole wheat flour. Add whole wheat flour to mixer in ½ cup increments, mixing on low speed until combined. Knead using mixer on medium speed for 6 to 12 minutes until dough is smooth and satiny and small bubbles form just below the surface. Dough will probably be sticky.

6. Flour pastry board with flour left over after re-measuring. Oil a large bowl. Turn dough out of mixer bowl onto the floured pastry board and knead by hand, adding just enough flour to prevent dough from sticking to hands. Form a ball. Roll the ball of dough in the oiled bowl to coat. Cover with a snap on plastic cover or a damp cloth towel and let rise in a warm place until dough is doubled in bulk, about 60 to 90 minutes. If using a towel, check periodically and spray with a misting bottle as needed to keep top of dough and towel damp.

7. Punch dough down; divide into portions for as many loaves as you plan to make. For each loaf, further divide dough into 3 equal balls. Working with one at a time shape each ball into a rope about 1" to 1½ " in diameter. Place 3 ropes lengthwise on the pastry board (do not stretch). Pinch ends together at one end to seal. Braid ropes, and pinch loose ends together to seal. Place braid into a loaf pan that has been prepared with cooking spray or greased with butter. Braid should only fill pan about half way up the height of the pan, and need not reach each end or edge of pan, since dough will expand as it rises. Repeat procedure with remaining dough to form additional braided loaves. (Alternately, instead of using pans, place each braid on a parchment sheet laid on a rimless baking sheet or the bottom side of a cookie sheet or sheet pan. After proofing, parchment will be transferred by sliding it onto a pizza stone that has been pre-heated for 30 minutes.)

8. Cover with a damp cloth towel and let rise 30 minutes to an hour, or until doubled in size. Check periodically and spray with a misting bottle as needed to keep top of loaves and towel damp.

9. While loaves are end of proofing or rising period, preheat oven to 400°. Beat an egg in a small bowl to blend yolk and white. Using a very flexible (e.g., silicone bristles) brush, with a very light touch, mop or brush the tops of each loaf with a generous amount of egg mixture. (Note: any type of stiff bristles can puncture or collapse the loaves while brushing.) Then sprinkle rolled oats onto top of loaves. Egg mixture will help the oats stick.

10. Place loaf on center rack of oven. (Or transfer parchment and loaves to pizza stone by sliding the parchment from the pan to the pizza stone.) Immediately turn heat down to 375°. Bake for 25 - 35 minutes or until golden brown. Loaves should sound hollow when tapped. Remove from pan; and cool on wire rack.