

Tender Potato Bread

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from Home Baking: The Artful Mix of Flour & Tradition Around the World by Jeffrey Alford and Naomi Duguid

makes 1 large tender-crumbed pan loaf AND something more; one 10X15 inch crusty yet tender foccacia, 12 soft dinner rolls, or a small pan loaf

4 medium to large floury (baking) potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks.

[Tanna Note: For the beginner bread baker I suggest no more than 8 ounces of potato; for the more advanced no more than 16 ounces. The variety of potatoes you might want to use would include Idaho, Russet & Yukon gold, there are others.]

4 cups (950 ml) water, reserve cooking water

1 tbsp plus 1 tsp salt

2 tsps active dry yeast

6 ½ cups to 8 ½ cups (1 kg to 1350g) unbleached all-purpose flour

1 tbsp unsalted butter, softened

1 cup (130g) whole wheat flour

making the dough (directions for making by hand):

Put potatoes and 4 cups water in a sauce pan and bring to boil. Add 1 tsp salt and cook, half covered, until the potatoes are very tender. Drain potatoes, SAVE POTATO WATER, and mash potatoes well. Measure out 3 cups (750ml) of reserved potato water. Add extra water if needed to make 3 cups. Place the water and mashed potatoes in the bowl you plan to mix the bread dough in. Let cool to lukewarm (70-80°F/21 – 29°C) – stir well before testing the temperature. If using active dry yeast or fresh yeast, mix & stir yeast into cooled water and mashed potatoes & water and let stand 5 minutes. Then add 2 cups of flour to the yeast mix and allow to rest several minutes. If using instant dry yeast, add yeast to 2 cups all-purpose flour and whisk. Add yeast and flour to the cooled mashed potatoes & water and mix well. Allow to rest/sit 5 minutes. Sprinkle in the remaining 1 tbsp salt and the softened butter; mix well. Add the 1 cup whole wheat flour, stir briefly. Add 2 cups of the unbleached all-purpose flour and stir until all the flour has been incorporated. Turn the dough out onto a generously floured surface and knead for about 10 minutes, incorporating flour as needed to prevent sticking. The dough will be very sticky to begin with, but as it takes up more flour from the kneading surface, it will become easier to handle; use a dough scraper to keep your surface clean. The kneaded dough will still be very soft. Place the dough in a large clean bowl or your rising container of choice, cover with plastic wrap or lid, and let rise about 2 hours or until doubled in volume. Turn the dough out onto a well-floured surface and knead gently several minutes. It will be moist and a little sticky.

forming the bread:

Divide the dough into 2 unequal pieces in a proportion of one-third and two-thirds (one will be twice as large as the other). Place the smaller piece to one side and cover loosely.

To shape the large loaf:

Butter a 9 x 5 x 2.5 inch loaf/bread pan. Flatten the larger piece of dough on the floured surface to an approximate 12 x 8 inch oval, then roll it up from a narrow end to form a loaf. Pinch the seam closed and gently place seam side down in the buttered pan. The dough should come about three-quarters of the way up the sides of the pan. Cover with plastic wrap and let rise for 35 to 45 minutes, until puffy and almost doubled in volume.

To make a small loaf with the remainder:

Butter an 8x4X2 inch bread pan. Shape and proof the loaf the same way as the large loaf.

To make rolls:

Butter a 13 x 9 inch sheet cake pan or a shallow cake pan. Cut the dough into 12 equal pieces. Shape each into a ball under the palm of your floured hand and place on the baking sheet, leaving 1/2 inch between the balls. Cover with plastic wrap and let rise for about 35 minutes, until puffy and almost doubled.

To make focaccia:

Flatten out the dough to a rectangle about 10 x 15 inches with your palms and fingertips. Tear off a piece of parchment paper or wax paper a little longer than the dough and dust it generously with flour. Transfer the focaccia to the paper. Brush the top of the dough generously with olive oil, sprinkle on a little coarse sea salt, as well as some rosemary leaves, if you wish and then finally dimple all over with your fingertips. Cover with plastic and let rise for 20 minutes.

baking the bread:

Note about baking order: bake the flat-bread before you bake the loaf; bake the rolls at the same time as the loaf.

Note about baking temps from Tanna: I believe that 450°F(230°C) is going to prove to be too hot for the either the large or small loaf of bread for the entire 40/50 minutes. I am going to put the loaves in at 450°(230°C) for 10 minutes and then turn the oven down to 375°F (190 °C) for the remaining time.

Note about cooling times: Let all the breads cool on a rack for at least 30 minutes before slicing. Rolls can be served warm or at room temperature.

For loaves and rolls:

Dust risen loaves and rolls with a little all-purpose flour or lightly brush the tops with a little melted butter or olive oil (the butter will give a golden/browned crust). Slash loaves crosswise two or three times with a razor blade or very sharp knife and immediately place on the stone, tiles or baking sheet in the oven. Place the rolls next to the loaf in the oven. Bake rolls until golden, about 30 minutes. Bake the small loaf for about 40 minutes. Bake the large loaf for about 50 minutes. Transfer the rolls to a rack when done to cool. When the loaf or loaves have baked for the specified time, remove from the pans and place back on the stone, tiles or baking sheet for another 5 to 10 minutes.

The corners should be firm when pinched and the bread should sound hollow when tapped on the bottom.

For focaccia:

Place a baking stone or unglazed quarry tiles, if you have them, if not use a no edged baking/sheet (you want to be able to slide the shaped dough on the parchment paper onto the stone or baking sheet and an edge complicates things). Place the stone or cookie sheet on a rack in the center of the oven and preheat to 450°F/230°C. If making focaccia, just before baking, dimple the bread all over again with your fingertips.

Leaving it on the paper, transfer to the hot baking stone, tiles or baking sheet. Bake until golden, about 10 minutes. Transfer to a rack (remove paper) and let cool at least 10 minutes before serving.