

Ballymaloe Irish Brown Bread - Makes 1 loaf

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Ingredients:

- 400 g (14 oz / 3 1/2 cups) strong (stone-ground) wholemeal flour plus 50 g (2oz / 1/2 cup) strong white flour (bread flour)
- 425 ml (15 fl oz / scant 2 cups) warm water, not hot
- 1 teaspoon black treacle or molasses
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 20 g – 30 g (3/4 oz – 1 oz) fresh non-GM yeast
- Sesame seeds – optional
- 1 loaf tin 13 x 20 cm (5 x 8 inch) approx.
- Sunflower oil

When making Ballymaloe brown yeast bread, remember that yeast is a living organism. In order to grow, it requires warmth, moisture and nourishment. The yeast feeds on the sugar and produces bubbles of carbon dioxide which causes the bread to rise. White or brown sugar, honey golden syrup, treacle or molasses may be used. Each will give a slightly different flavor to the bread. At Ballymaloe we use treacle. The dough rises more rapidly with 30 g (1 oz) yeast than with 25 g (3/4 oz) yeast. We use a stone ground wholemeal.

Different flours produce breads of different textures and flavor. The amount of natural moisture in the flour varies according to atmospheric conditions. The quantity of water should be altered accordingly.

The dough should be just too wet to knead - in fact it does not require kneading. The main ingredients - wholemeal flour, treacle and yeast are highly nutritious. Note: Dried yeast may be used instead of baker's yeast. Follow the same method but use only half the weight given for fresh yeast. Allow longer to rise. Fast acting yeast may also be used, follow the instructions on the packet.

Directions:

Preheat the oven to 450° F. Mix the flour with the salt. The ingredients should all be at room temperature. In a small bowl or Pyrex jug, mix the molasses with some of the water, 150 ml (5 fl oz / generous 1/2 cup) for 1 loaf and crumble in the yeast. Sit the bowl for a few minutes in a warm place to allow the yeast to start to work. Meanwhile check to see if the yeast is rising. After about 4 or 5 minutes it will have a creamy and slightly frothy appearance on top. When ready, stir and pour it, with all the remaining water (10 fl oz / 275 ml), into the flour to make a loose-wet dough.

The mixture should be too wet to knead. Allow to sit in the bowl for 7 - 10 minutes (time varies depending on room temperature). Meanwhile, brush the base and sides of the bread tins with a good sunflower oil. Scoop the mixture into the greased tin. Sprinkle the top of the loaves with sesame seeds if you like.

Put the tin in a warm place somewhere close to the cooker or near a radiator perhaps. Cover the tin with a tea towel to prevent a skin from forming. Just as the bread comes to the top of the tin, remove the tea towel and pop the loaves in the oven 450° F for 20 minutes, then turn the oven down to 400° F for another 40 - 50 minutes or until it looks nicely browned and sound hollow when tapped. The bread will rise a little further in the oven. This is called "oven spring". If however the bread rises to the top of the tin before it goes into the oven it will continue to rise and flow over the edges.

We usually remove the loaf from the tin about 10 minutes before the end of cooking and put them back into the oven to crisp all round, but if you like a softer crust there's no need to do this.

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Jude's Note:

As I have mentioned before, if you are ever in Shanagarry, County Cork, you simply must make time to visit Ballymaloe Cookery School. You will not be sorry. Everything about the place is pure joy. The lavish grounds, friendly staff, and sublime accommodations in the new guest house will have you wanting to move in as a permanent resident. You can even sign up for a few day courses. They offer different classes all year long for the public. If you put one bite of anything they make, your eyes will roll back in your head, and you will think you have died and gone to Heaven. Their brown bread is the absolute best. It is easy to make, and even more simple to eat.