

bread batter, for its first rising, when, and how long to knead the dough, when, and how to make and bake the loaves.

It seems to the uninitiated a very formidable undertaking, requiring peculiar judgment and discretion; yet it cannot be very difficult to learn, else how does it happen that this little girl near me, just past her eighth birth-day, has made ten or a dozen goodly batches of bread within a half year, and never a sour, or heavy, or tough loaf in all that she has made. The manipulation was all her own, but mother's "judgment" was always at hand and freely used. The first sponge was set in a pint basin, but every one since has been sufficient for at least three common bread-tin loaves. No Kindergarten at our house has proved more entertaining, and perhaps none more profitable than bread-making. At least one boy has learned the art as a pastime, and whatever may be his future lot, need never starve for good, light bread, when proper materials can be obtained. It is really help, too, for a mother, when her children, with clean hands and cheerful hearts, work at the bread dough, with a wholesome ambition to produce the sweetest and lightest, and finest possible loaves of bread.

There are many ways of making good yeast bread. The very best, in my opinion, is mixed with fresh, sweet milk. Many consider sweet skimmed milk with a little butter melted in it, just about as good, but if you add the butter, there is no economy in substituting skimmed milk for fresh. The far-famed Parker House bread is made, I am told, of simply yeast, flour, and water, and I am very certain that delicious bread, sweet, light, and tender, can be made from these three things alone, when they are of good quality, and carefully and skilfully used. This care and skill any well-disposed child can learn, so no housekeeper must consider it beyond her attainments.

Many good recipes for yeast are given in books and papers, and every neighborhood has house-keepers who make excellent yeast. I always use, of late, some form of dry yeast, such as my grocery store will furnish. It costs no more than home-made yeast, and saves a deal of care in either hot or freezing weather, requiring only a dry place for storage. It is quite as good as jug yeast.

It is usually most convenient to begin the bread-making, or "set the sponge," at night, and so get the baking done early the next day, but it can all be done in the same day, if desired, by beginning before breakfast. This brings the baking late in the day, and most of us do not like it. At night, or in the evening, we make a soft batter of warm water and flour and yeast, the quantity of each depending upon the number of loaves desired. The proportions are generally the same, though no precise rule can be given, as flour and yeast differ in their properties.

Miss Beecher says that it takes about a quart of flour to make each loaf, and for four loaves a quart of wetting. But loaves vary in size. For a baking of this size, you need about three-fourths of a cake of good dry yeast in summer, in winter a whole cake. This yeast must be soaked in warm water half an hour or less before using. The yeast will not work if scalded. A gill of lively, soft, or baker's yeast, answers for the same sized baking. Take a portion of your flour (say two quarts), and (if you do as I do) pour half of your wetting into it boiling hot, only scalding about half of the flour you use in the sponge. Use the other half of the wetting

lukewarm, and see that the batter is below the scalding point when you add the yeast. In summer you may make the sponge at a lower temperature than in winter, but should never be cold. Make it of such thickness that it will not separate or become watery over the top, but thin enough to stir and pour easily. Set in a warm place, covered loosely—wrapped up warm in winter.

In a warm kitchen this sponge rises in from three to five hours; if the materials are good, it seldom sours during the night, but must be looked after very early, and if light, must be kneaded without delay. Some housekeepers stir dissolved soda into it, always at this point, whether it is sour or not, but this is sheer folly. If the flour and yeast are good, it is very seldom that a good housekeeper has occasion to put any soda into her bread. If the bread smells sour (not simply yeasty), or tastes sour, put in dissolved soda in the proportion of a teaspoonful to a quart of wetting used in the sponge. Dissolve the soda in warm water or sweet milk (and I add to it two heaping teaspoonfuls of sugar), and stir it into the sponge before kneading. Stir in flour until your batter is too stiff for your strong spoon, then begin to work with your hands, keeping flour between your hands and the soft dough, and always between the dough and board. As soon as the bread is stiff enough to knead without sticking, cease to work in flour, but knead with as little flour as possible upon the board, and work it hard with the hands for at least half an hour. The "Parker House" baker says he kneads two hours, but of course he makes larger "patches." Put the dough back into the pan or tray, and keep it warm.

The dough now rise until it doubles in size. It must rise enough, or it will not be light and elastic in texture. It must not rise too much, or it will lose the natural sweetness of the wheat, and about all that one can say here is "cultivate judgment." If, at this stage, the bread turns sour in any degree, it is still possible to neutralize the acidity by the use of soda, and this is the best way to do it: mix soda and dry flour together, and knead them into your loaves very thoroughly. The dough requires a very thorough kneading, without more flour, when made into loaves, in order to secure a uniform texture. If you plan four loaves, you may knead half of it for a few minutes, then work the other half as long, and then divide into separate loaves, and knead each one well before putting it into the well-buttered tins. If the dough is sour, half a teaspoonful of soda for each loaf should be mixed with a little flour and kneaded in. Though the bread may be nice, I never feel that I have been very successful when I have had to use soda. The loaves should be set in a warm place, and allowed to rise light, or double in size, before they go into the oven—not too light, as they are pretty sure to rise a little more after they go into the oven, unless the oven is too hot for bread. Prick the loaves on the top with a fork or knife, when light, before baking, to prevent a loose upper crust. Bake steadily for an hour or a little longer, according to the size of the loaves.

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