

COB LOAF

Paul Hollywood's Crusty Cob Loaf

Making bread takes time, but it's not difficult.

Try Paul's recipe for a delicious crusty loaf.



Easy

COB LOAF



PREPARATION



Preparation time: 2-3 hours

Cooking time: 30 minutes

Makes: 1 loaf

INGREDIENTS

- 500g/1lb 1oz strong white bread flour, plus a little extra flour for finishing
- 40g/1½oz soft butter
- 12g/2 sachets fast action dried yeast
- 10g/2 tsp salt
- About 300ml tepid water (warm not cold – about body temperature)
- A little olive or sunflower oil
- Additional cold water, for creating steam in the oven

EQUIPMENT

- Large mixing bowl
- Flat baking tray
- Old roasting tin
- Clean tea towel
- Baking parchment or silicone paper (not greaseproof)

METHOD

Stage one

1. Weigh out the ingredients.
2. Put the flour into a large mixing bowl and add the butter. Add the yeast to one side of the bowl and add the salt to the other – the salt will kill the yeast if they come into direct contact. Stir all the ingredients with a spoon to combine.
3. Add half of the water and turn the mixture round with your fingers. Continue to add water a little at a time, combining well, until you've picked up all of the flour from the sides of the bowl. You may not need to add all of the water, or you may need to add a little more – you want a dough that is well combined and soft, but not sticky or soggy. Mix with your fingers to make sure all of the ingredients are combined and use the mixture to clean the inside of the bowl. Keep going until the mixture forms a rough dough.
4. Use about a teaspoon of oil to lightly grease a clean work surface – using oil instead of flour will keep the texture of the dough consistent. Put your dough onto the greased work surface. Make sure you have plenty of space.
5. Fold the far edge of the dough into the middle, then turn the dough by a quarter turn and repeat. Do this several times until the dough is very lightly coated in olive oil.
6. Now use your hands to knead the dough. Push the dough out in one direction with the heel of your hand, then fold it back on itself, turn the dough a quarter turn and repeat. Kneading in this way stretches the gluten and makes the dough elastic. Do this for about 4 or 5 minutes until the dough is smooth and stretchy. Work quickly so that the mixture doesn't stick to your hands – if it does get too sticky you can add a little flour to your hands.
7. Clean and lightly oil your mixing bowl and put the dough back into it. Cover with a damp tea towel or lightly oiled cling film and leave it on one side to prove. This gives the yeast time to work and the dough will double in size. This should take about an hour, but will vary depending on the temperature of your room.

TOP TIP

Leave the dough to prove in a warm, but not hot place. In hot temperatures the yeast will work too quickly and your bread won't have as much flavour.



Stage two

8. Line a baking tray with baking parchment or silicone paper.
9. Once the dough has doubled in size you can scrape it out of the bowl to shape it. The texture should be bouncy and shiny. Put it onto a lightly floured surface and knock it back - use your hand to roll the dough up, then turn by a quarter turn and roll it up again. Repeat several times. Then use your hands to gently turn and smooth it into a round loaf shape.
10. Place onto the lined baking tray, cover with a tea towel or lightly oiled cling film and leave to prove again until it's doubled in size. This will take about an hour, but may be quicker or slower depending on how warm your kitchen is.
11. Preheat the oven to 220°C (200°C fan assisted)/425F/ Gas 7. Put an old, empty roasting tin into the bottom of the oven.



Stage three

12. After an hour the loaf should have risen again. Sprinkle some flour on top and very gently rub it in. Use a large, sharp knife to make shallow cuts about 1cm deep across the top of the loaf to create a diamond pattern.
13. Put the loaf on the baking tray into the middle of the oven. Pour cold water into the empty roasting tray at the bottom of the oven just before you shut the door - this creates steam which helps the loaf develop a crisp and shiny crust.
14. Bake the loaf for about 30 minutes.
15. The loaf is cooked when it's risen and golden. To check, take it out of the oven and tap it gently underneath - it should sound hollow. Turn onto a wire rack to cool.



EQUIPMENT AND INGREDIENTS



EGGS

Eggs play different roles in baking. In cakes the whole eggs are used to bind ingredients together and make the cake rise. In a soufflé the yolks and whites are separated - the yolks are used to thicken a custard base and the whites are whisked to make the soufflé light.

When whisked vigorously by hand, or with electric beaters, egg whites increase in volume to form soft, then stiff peaks. These whisked whites can be mixed with sugar to make meringues, or folded into a flour-based sauce to make soufflés. It's important to fold in whisked egg whites gently so that you don't knock out the air - this air is what gives the light and airy texture.

Any speck of fat or yolk can prevent the whites from whisking to full volume, so it's important to use a clean whisk and bowl and avoid breaking any yolk into the whites. For this reason, it's a good idea to separate each egg into two small bowls, so that you can add the whites to a large mixing bowl, one at a time.

Always use the size of eggs given by the recipe.



SUGAR

As well as providing sweetness in cakes and biscuits, sugar also encourages dough and batter to brown when they're baked, giving a lovely golden colour and caramelised flavour. In bread a small amount of sugar will 'feed' the yeast and increase fermentation, but large quantities of sugar will slow down fermentation, which is why sweet bread can take a long time to rise. Too much sugar in a cake or biscuit can cause it to burn before it's cooked through.

Refined sugars are sold as granulated (coarse), caster sugar (fine) and icing sugar (a fine powder). Caster sugar is best for most baking recipes and either white or golden can be used. Unrefined sugars have more flavour and range from dark muscovado sugar to light brown sugars.

Icing sugar is used for dusting cakes, biscuits and soufflés, sweetening pastry or mixing with liquids or fats to make icing.