

# *Living a Simple Life* with a Back Porch View

Dear Listener:

Thank you for stopping by for a visit at Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View podcast! To make it easy, you will find a transcript of each episode. I hope you enjoy the visit!

## **Episode 17- Baking Bread: The Aroma of Love**

*Welcome to Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View. Thanks for stopping by! Grab a glass of Lemonade, pull up a rocker and join me for conversations about living the Simple Life. Go ahead. Get comfortable and settle in for a good visit. It's time to relax and enjoy!*

In my pursuit of living a simple life, I look for things that can move me forward I more than one category. Learning to bake bread is a perfect example. First, I am fulfilling a goal to stretch my wings in the cooking and baking meals at home category and feeding my family. Second, I am applying skills in the frugal category, using ingredients I have on hand in my pantry.

My creative nature is happy because there are almost endless ingredient combinations – from a plain white bread to Pesto Parmesan Ciabatta.

And baking bread helps me to take care of my neighbors, because almost everyone loves a fresh baked loaf still warm from the oven.

The first time I thought about attempting it, I have to admit to a certain degree of intimidation. I was young and still had the tendency to be somewhat concerned about what others would think. Was baking your own bread too old fashioned? Fortunately, I didn't worry about that for too long. Instead, I dove in and got busy.

It took a few tries. I created everything from a soggy dough to a loaf of bread that could have been used as building materials for a brick house. There were also a couple of times it took longer to clean flour off the ceiling than it took to make the bread from start to finish. But I stuck with it, and I'm glad I did.

From the ritual of mixing and kneading the dough and the aroma of bread baking to the incredible flavor, learning to bake your own bread is well worth the effort.

Making your own bread really is an easy thing to do. It does take patience as there are many steps to take, and between each one is a waiting period – which is often called the rising time. But when you smell the aroma coming from the oven, and then take the first bite, you should be hooked.

Breads come in many different flavors – rye, whole wheat, buttermilk, and whole grain to name a few – and with each flavor there are hundreds of varieties. But when you get down to basics, there are few ingredients needed. French bread, when it comes to ingredients, is one of the simplest, requiring flour, salt, yeast and water. The less simple part of the process is how to get that crusty outside, which requires misting and steaming the loaves once they are in the oven. Some rye breads will include caraway seeds in the ingredients; some recipes call for sugar or honey to be added for a hint of sweetness.

I have an apple bread recipe that calls for chopped apples, cinnamon, and other spices, and can be quite messy to make, as the final step requires chopping the dough into small pieces, then placing those pieces in the pan. Trust me, you will spend some time cleaning up that mess from your board – but once you taste the final product, you will be more than willing to make the mess again and again!

Where most breads fail is the temperature of the water or liquid added and insufficient kneading. In most recipes, the liquid needs to be between 110 and 115 degrees. The normal process is to add the yeast to that water, stir until it is dissolved, and wait five minutes or so to allow it to begin bubbling.

A simple trick I learned years ago was to add a sprinkling of sugar on top of the dissolved mixture. The yeast begins feeding on the sugar, figuratively ‘waking it up’. Once that happens, you add the yeast to a large bowl, then begin adding the other ingredients.

When you add the flour, it is best to add it one cup, or one-half cup at a time. This makes it easier to incorporate the flour into the dough. Once all the ingredients are blended, it will result in a rather shaggy-looking ball. To me, it is better to add a little less flour, leaving you a bit wetter shaggy ball. You will need flour to knead the dough, which in turn incorporates more flour into the dough. Too much flour will cause your bread to be as heavy as a brick, so be sparing both when mixing and again while kneading.

Once the dough is at the shaggy stage, it is time to turn it out onto a flour board. Thanks to my cousins, Steve and Rose, I now have a huge granite island in my kitchen. One of the benefits of granite or marble is that you can cool it down or warm it up to help with working with dough.

Pie crusts, croissants and other pastries really beg for a cool to cold working area. Breads prefer it warmer. So, I heat a couple of towels in the dryer and lay them across my island before I begin kneading. It adds just enough warmth to keep my dough at a good temperature. When I'm ready for the kneading stage, I just remove the towels, sprinkle flour and start the process.

To knead bread, you use a push / fold /turn motion. With the palm of your hand, push down the center of the dough. Fold it over, give it a one-quarter clockwise turn, then push down again. Here's the tough part. You need to continue to do this for approximately 8 to 10 minutes.

As you knead, the dough will become smoother and elastic. By the time you are finished kneading, you should be able to push your finger in the center of the dough and watch it spring back. When it is to that point, then you place it in a lightly greased bowl, cover it with a clean dish towel and set it aside.

The first rising - which is also called the primary or bulk fermentation stage - can take anywhere from 1 to 2 hours. The goal is to have it double in size. From this point, each recipe may differ. For some, you can simply turn the dough out onto a floured board, shape it, place it in the pan to let it rise a second time. Some recipes call for additional kneading and shaping - - which is called the proofing stage - before baking.

The French bread I make requires 2 fermentation stages. After the first rising, I need to punch the dough down in the bowl, then re-cover until it has doubled. I then will be required to re-knead it, shape it into baguettes and let it proof. Follow your recipe for the best results.

There is also another way to let your bread rise for the first time. I learned it from Peter Reinhart in his book *Crust and Crumb*. It's called retarding the dough and allows the bread to rise slowly in the refrigerator for at least 12 hours, if not overnight. This allows the bread to rise slowly and allow the glutens and flavors develop more.

One thing about fermenting your dough - rising time will depend on the bread and the ingredients you use. Too short a rising time and the bread doesn't fully develop. Too long and the yeast will die. If your bread has an off-putting taste like ammonia or stale beer, you probably proofed it too long.

Once your bread is shaped and in the proofing stage, it's time to pre-heat the oven. I have some recipes that require pre-heating to 450 degrees, and then turning the temperature down to 425 degrees right before I place my bread in the oven. Preheating, regardless of the requirements, is a necessity with bread. Without a hot oven, your bread can start to fall, then try to regain its height. This causes your bread to toughen or just flat out not bake evenly.

If you are new to baking bread, the best place to start is with a basic recipe. Once you have that successfully tucked under your apron strings, be brave and branch out. Tackle making your own sourdough starter.

A sour dough starter is a blend of flour and water. Some recipes call for a bit of yeast, and some even call for honey or sugar to help feed the yeast. But a natural starter only requires flour and water, then allow to sit on the counter for 12 to 24 hours to 'catch' the natural yeast in the air.

Once you have your starter mixed, put it in a glass, plastic, or ceramic jar or bowl and cover with a dish towel, a loose-fitting glass lid or cheesecloth.

There are two things you never do with a sourdough starter. First, never use a metal or cast-iron container. The starter is considered an acid and it will have an unsafe reaction to the metal.

The second thing you never do is put a tight lid on your starter when first making it or feeding and maintaining it. Starters build up gases, and those gases need a way to escape. I use a 1/2-gallon canning jar. When I am mixing up a new batch or feeding an existing one, I cover it with a piece of cheesecloth and secure it with a metal canning ring. Once the starter is bubbly and ready to be stored in the refrigerator, then and only then do I put a white plastic cap on the jar.

Your starter will begin to bubble within the first 12 to 24 hours. This tells you it is active. At this point, you can use it in a recipe, or begin the feeding and maintenance process. Whether you are using it to bake a loaf of bread or maintaining your starter, the process then becomes a matter of removing a portion and adding more flour and water to the original starter. And if properly maintained, it can last for years.

Once you are comfortable enough with baking bread that you could make it in your sleep, I challenge you to learn to make your own pastries. There is nothing better than a homemade croissant, and I love making pastries like bear claws and cheese Danish. Even better, your family will love you for the treats.

Let me know how baking bread works for you. If you have questions about it, don't hesitate to ask. I will be happy to help in any way I can!

If you want to learn more about the topic at hand, including a recipe or two and a fun Baking Bread as a Relationship eBook, or get a transcript for this episode, just visit my website at [www.thefarmwife.com/podcast](http://www.thefarmwife.com/podcast). That is the Resource page for this podcast and I have it set up by episodes to make things easier to find. To help you out, this is Episode 17.

And while you're there, you can leave your comments at the end of the page. Be sure to tell me what you think and share your own thoughts and ideas. I would love to hear from you!

If you have questions or need some help with your own bread baking process, you can stop by for an email visit at [thevirtualporch@gmail.com](mailto:thevirtualporch@gmail.com). I am happy to help in any way I can.

And be sure to subscribe – you don't want to miss a single conversation. I'll be sitting on the porch every Monday morning waiting for your visit!

Thanks again for stopping in. I will see you next week on Living a Simple Life with a Back Porch View. And while you are waiting on the next episode, grab that glass of refreshment, pull up a rocker, and sit back for a while. It's time to

Relax & Enjoy!

*julie*