

Dane grain

Rye, a hardy cereal grass closely related to wheat, originated in south-west Asia. Thriving in cold climates and on poor soils, it was first cultivated by the Romans and by the middle ages had become the staple grain of Europe. It was taken to North America in the 17th century by Dutch settlers. Rye bread, dark with a rather powerful flavour, was never favoured in Britain – to be able to buy white bread was a sign of status – but has always been popular on the continent of Europe, especially in Scandinavia, Russia and the Balkans.

Dark and light rye flours can be bought, the darker ones having more bran and stronger taste. The gluten in rye flour is not the same as that in wheat flour and does not have the same high-rise capacity.

Consequently, rye dough is harder to work, stickier and less elastic and it cracks and spreads in the oven. Although rye meal or flour does not store well, bread made from it has excellent keeping qualities. Pumpernickel, from Germany, sometimes called black bread, is one of the very few breads made solely from rye flour. Other “rye” breads are made with a mixture of wheat and rye, and come in all shapes and sizes. Scandinavians in particular delight in serving many kinds at once. The Danes favour firm, compact sourdough rye breads for their famous *smørrebrød* or open sandwiches. Rye breads in the USA can be sweet or sour – the sweetness comes from molasses (see page 286), and the sour from a leaven or sourdough starter kept back from a previous batch of bread.

Rye breads are often spiced – caraway, aniseed, dill and cumin seeds are the most common and are mixed into the dough or sprinkled on top. A shiny top is achieved by two or three brushings with an egg glaze. Many crispbreads, Ryvita for example, are made from rye flour. In central Europe rye flour goes into gingerbreads and honey

cakes and in Scandinavia it is also used for crunchy biscuits and cookies. Like all grains, rye can be fermented to make alcohol. Rye whisky is a favourite in the USA, and in Russia *kvass*, a thin beer, is usually made from rye although occasionally barley is used instead.

RUSSIAN RYE PUDDING

Melt 4oz (125g) butter in a frying pan. Add 12oz (350g) rye breadcrumbs, 6 tbsp (6×15ml) demerara sugar and the grated rind of 1 lemon and fry till crisp and golden. Peel, core and slice 1½lb (700g) cooking apples and toss in juice of the lemon mixed with 3 tbsp (3×15ml) caster sugar. Spread one-third of the crumb mixture over the base of an ovenproof dish and cover with half the sliced apples. Repeat the layers and finish with a layer of crumbs. Bake at 375F (190C) Gas 5 for 30 minutes till the apples are tender and the topping crisp. Serve with cream. **Serves 6**

RYE DUMPLINGS FOR SOUP

Put ½ pint (300ml) cold water in pan with 4oz (125g) butter. Stir over gentle heat till butter melts, then bring to boil. Remove from heat and tip in 2oz (50g) each of rye and plain flour. Beat with wooden spoon over low heat till mixture leaves sides of pan. Remove from heat and cool slightly. Beat in 3 eggs, 1oz (25g) Parmesan, 1 tbsp (15ml) chopped parsley and plenty of seasoning. Drop marble-sized pieces into gently boiling salted water. Poach for 3–4 minutes till dumplings rise to surface. Remove with draining spoon, keep hot while rest cook. Serve in clear soups. The dumplings can be frozen after poaching. Spread on tray, cool and then open freeze. Pack in polythene bags, seal and label. Use as required – add to cooked soup and simmer for 3–4 minutes till hot.

Rye bread

The strong wholesome flavour and dense texture of rye bread make a welcome change from bland white bread, and it has good keeping qualities. Rye flour, however, does not store well so buy small amounts only and use up as quickly as possible. In breads, vary flavour with caraway, dill or cumin seeds

BREAD

Makes 1 loaf

Overall timing 1½ hours plus proving and cooling

Equipment 3 bowls, 1lb (450g) loaf tin

Freezing Cool completely, foil-wrap, seal, label and freeze. Freezer life: 1 month.

To use: thaw in wrappings for 4–6 hours at room temperature

INGREDIENTS

9oz	Strong plain flour	250g
3oz	Rye flour	75g
1½ teasps	Salt	7.5ml
½oz	Fresh yeast or	15g
2 teasps	Dried yeast	2×5ml
½ teasps	Sugar	2.5ml

METHOD

- 1 Sift the flours and salt into a large bowl and leave in a warm place.
- 2 Cream the fresh yeast with ¼ pint (150ml) hand-hot water and add the sugar. If using dried yeast dissolve the sugar in the water and sprinkle the yeast over. Mix well and leave in a warm place for about 15 minutes till frothy.
- 3 Make a well in the centre of the flour and pour the yeast mixture in. Mix with a wooden spoon, gradually adding more warm water if necessary, till dough binds together.
- 4 Knead on a floured surface for about 5 minutes till smooth. Place in a floured bowl, cover with oiled polythene and leave in a warm place to prove till doubled in size. Grease the tin.
- 5 Turn the dough out on to a floured surface and knock back. Knead till smooth, then make into a short thick sausage shape. Put into the loaf tin, cover loosely with oiled polythene and leave to prove till doubled in size.
- 6 Preheat the oven to 450F (230C) Gas 8.
- 7 Bake in the centre of the oven for 15 minutes. Reduce the temperature to 375F (190C) Gas 5 and bake for a further 15 minutes. Switch off the oven. Take loaf out of tin and leave on the centre shelf of oven till oven is cold.