

Habit Bread by *Kem Luther*

Soak two cups of oatmeal in four cups of boiling water. I generally use quick oats, but traditional rolled oats are fine as long as you get them soft -- cooking them at a simmer for ten minutes would probably help.

At any point after the oats have softened you can add the following:

1/2 cup oil -- safflower, vegetable, or whatever

2/3 cup honey

2 tablespoons salt

*a cup powdered or instant milk or instant soymilk powder or cup of soy milk

*some wheat germ, to taste. I use about 3/4 cup

*some bran. I use about 1 cup

*some some flaxseed meal, to bowel tolerance. I use about 1/2 cup

*in recent years I have started adding 1/2 cup of tapioca flour (to make the slices sturdy and smooth) and 1/2 cup sorghum flour (to give it a slightly grittier taste)

When the mixture has cooled to lukewarm (under 115 degrees Fahrenheit) you can add the yeast. I use about 1 or 2 tablespoons of instant dry yeast. But take care that the whole mixture has really cooled before adding the yeast. The ability of a mass of oats to retain heat is truly phenomenal—it is easy to damage or destroy the yeast ferment by adding it too early. I usually start the yeast in a cup or two of warm water mixed with a teaspoon of sugar about ten minutes before I add it.

Blend all of this well and start adding dry ingredients. You can add up to 50% whole wheat flour, but I've gradually decreased the whole wheat content over the years and upped the amount of bran and wheat germ. I use only white flour (unbleached, of course) in most batches. Keep working in the flour and other ingredients until you have something that looks like it could be kneaded. You should be able to get in about ten or eleven cups of flour, but the humidity, altitude and condition of the flour all affect the amount of flour needed.

After you turn the dough from the pan, knead it for at least five minutes, the more the better. Let it rise to double size, then punch it down and put it in bread pans. Let it rise in the bread pans about 20-30 minutes. I have found that if you use good bread tins, grease them moderately before each use, and store them in the freezer between loaves, it isn't necessary to wash them.

Before I put the pans in the oven, I use a boxcutter knife to make a lengthwise cut along the middle of the loaf. This helps to keep the top of the loaf from lifting off the sides. Then I spray the tops with water and sprinkle on sesame seeds.

Bake at 300 degrees Fahrenheit for about 55 minutes, or 350 for less. Too little cooking and the added oat bulk will keep the loaf pasty, too much and the bottom burns. When it is done perfectly, the loaf will look a little too moist if you cut it while it is still hot, but it will be just right after it cools.

This bread freezes well. After the bread has cooled I put everything which we are not going to use in the next two days in the freezer.

*optional