

Breaking Bread

Quick breads bring family and friends together.

How wonderful to have a kitchen full of the delicious aromas of baking! A quick bread is an easy way to arrive at this ideal without too much whisking, beating, creaming, and generally worrying about the results. These recipes are pretty much foolproof and, as you'll see, yield really satisfying results. Just follow along and you'll have something warm and fragrant to cut into or be proud to give as a gift—and in no time.

BY SERENA BASS

DATE AND PRUNE QUICK BREAD
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PHOTOGRAPHY TERRY BRENNAN
FOOD STYLING LARA MIKLASEVICS

Apple, Pine Nut, and Cardamom Quick Bread

MAKES 10 SLICES PER 11-INCH LOAF

This is a wonderful bread that freezes very well and can be kept wrapped in the fridge for at least 10 days. It is quick to make and has a haunting flavor that comes from the apples resting in the lemon juice for a few minutes. I have made this with and without the cardamom; either way it is fantastic and seems to get even better a day or two later.

- 4 Golden Delicious apples
- 1 zested lemon
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice
- 1 cup sugar, divided
- 5 large eggs
- 10 tablespoons melted butter
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 2½ cups flour, Hecksers or King Arthur
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1½ teaspoons ground cardamom
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ⅓ cup pine nuts

1. Position a rack in middle of oven and preheat to 350°F. Grease and flour an 11x4-inch loaf pan.
2. Peel apples, cut into thin ½-inch pieces, and place in bowl. Add zest, juice, and 2 tablespoons sugar. Mix together and set aside.
3. In a standing electric mixer, beat eggs and remaining sugar 2 minutes.
4. Gently stir in butter and vanilla. Slowly stir in flour, baking powder, cardamom, and salt.
5. Remove bowl from mixer, pour batter over apples, and fold in.
6. Pour mixture into pan and sprinkle pine nuts on top.
7. Bake 45 minutes, until a skewer inserted in center comes out clean. Will keep for a week wrapped well in the refrigerator. Will not freeze well as the apples become wet and mushy.

LESSONS LEARNED

- Even though these recipes are for quick breads, they are only quick if you have the ingredients on hand. If you like the idea of baking (avoiding preservatives and mysterious additives) but only do it occasionally, it can become anything but quick, so consider what you have in your pantry and start building a useful collection of baking ingredients.
- Sort your dried herbs and spices so you can access them quickly. In my kitchen, the cinnamon, cloves, nutmeg, ginger, baking powder, baking soda, and cream of tartar, for instance, are all in the same area. You'll be more aware when you're running out.
- Arrange and measure everything you'll need for the recipe and put it all in one spot in your chosen work area of the kitchen. It may sound like double the work, but it actually saves time and mistakes. I admit—and really, who hasn't done this?—to carefully shutting the oven door on a carrot cake and turning to see two eggs or a cup of walnuts sitting on the kitchen table.

Cherry and Poppyseed Bread with Almond Topping (not pictured)

MAKES 10 SLICES PER 11-INCH LOAF

This pretty bread is pale and interesting due to the use of egg whites rather than the whole egg. It has a speckling of poppy seeds and is studded with juicy, dried cherries. Personally, I must have crunch somewhere, so the top is scattered with almonds and sugar, but you could easily leave that off. As with any quick bread that includes dried fruit, this one just gets better and better. I have kept it for two weeks in the refrigerator, and it was still perfect.

- 2 cups Gold Medal flour
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons poppy seeds
- ⅓ cup vegetable oil
- ¾ cup plus 1½ teaspoons sugar
- 3 egg whites
- ⅔ cup buttermilk
- ¾ cup sour cream
- 1½ teaspoons pure almond extract
- 1 cup dried sour cherries (or canned sour cherries, very well drained and patted dry)
- ¼ cup almonds, skinned and sliced

1. Position a rack in middle of oven and preheat to 350°F. Grease an 11x4-inch loaf pan.
2. Sift together flour, baking powder, baking soda, and salt, then stir in poppy seeds. Set aside.
3. In a large bowl, mix oil, ¾ cup sugar, egg whites, buttermilk, sour cream, and almond extract until combined.
4. Fold in dry ingredients. When nearly combined, add cherries and keep folding until evenly distributed.
5. Scrape batter into pan, smooth to level, and scatter on almonds and 1½ teaspoons sugar.
6. Bake 60 to 65 minutes, until a skewer inserted in center comes out dry. Will keep for a week well wrapped in the refrigerator, and will keep for 2 months, well wrapped, in the freezer.



APPLE, PINE NUT, AND CARDAMOM QUICK BREAD

BAKING TIPS

- To line a loaf pan with parchment paper: Set the pan down along the edge of the paper and run a sharp knife tip around the pan. Spray the whole pan with non-stick spray (over the sink for less airborne grease), settle the paper on the base, and spray the paper. That way when you remove the paper, it won't stick to any fruit.
- Want to see if baking powder still has its original leavening power? Put a little in a cup of hot water. It should start fizzing and bubbling right away.
- To make buttermilk: Add 2 teaspoons lemon juice to 1 cup milk and let sit 5 minutes.
- Rinse any utensil or bowl that has flour on it with cold water first; hot water will make glue of the flour.

Date and Prune Quick Bread

MAKES 10 SLICES PER 11-INCH LOAF

This quick bread is thick with dried fruit and walnuts. It has a deliciously damp and chewy texture and is almost medieval in concept. I have been giving this bread as a gift during the holidays for years now, and everyone loves it.

- 1 cup dates, cut in thirds
- 1 cup prunes, cut in thirds
- ½ cup golden raisins
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- 8 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- 1 cup sugar
- 1 extra large egg
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 1⅓ cups flour
- 1 cup walnuts, toasted at 325°F for 12 minutes

1. Position a rack in middle of oven and preheat to 350°F. Grease an 11x4-inch loaf pan and line bottom with parchment paper.
2. Place dates, prunes, raisins, and baking soda in a bowl and pour over 1 cup boiling water. Mix together and set aside for no less than 1 hour and up to 2 hours.
3. In a standing electric mixer, cream butter, add sugar, and beat 2 minutes.
4. Add egg and vanilla, and beat 2 minutes. Add flour and slowly stir in. Add fruit and stir slowly to combine well. Stir in walnuts.
5. Pour into pan and bake 60 to 70 minutes, until a skewer inserted in middle comes out dry. Cool in pan. Will keep for 2 weeks in the refrigerator. Will not freeze well.

WRAP IT UP

- I prefer not to have aluminum foil touching any foods, so the first layer when wrapping a quick bread is parchment paper, sealed neatly and as airtight as possible. Next comes the label with the name of the quick bread and the date it was made. To gift a bread, follow with festive wrapping paper or a chic, utilitarian brown paper and rustic string, which I rather like.
- When freezing a quick bread, wrap in paper towel then in heavy-duty aluminum foil. Place in a zip-top bag to avoid ripping the foil. The paper towel will keep the cake fresh and mop up any juices seeping from dried fruit. A crispy crust will be a thing of the past, but you can always bring it back by heating a slice or two in the oven or, judiciously, in a toaster.

Orange Quick Bread

MAKES 6 TO 8 SLICES PER 8-INCH LOAF

In my recipe book, I have this listed as The Best Orange Quick Bread In The Whole World. A bold claim, but I guarantee you will agree. It spans the day, as I often make it plain and have a slice with my morning coffee or add the tart glaze and serve it for visitors around teatime.

To get very luxurious, I add the chocolate ganache. Orange and chocolate are a favorite combination, and because some of the chocolate sinks into the quick bread, it is a wonderful gooey surprise and can be served with vanilla or chocolate ice cream for dessert.

- 2 cups flour, Hecksers or King Arthur
- ¾ teaspoon sea salt
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- 1½ cups sugar
- ½ cup milk
- ½ cup fresh orange juice
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- 3 extra large eggs
- 1½ tablespoons grated orange zest

Ganache (optional)

- ⅓ cup heavy cream
- ½ cup Ghirardelli bittersweet chocolate chips

Glaze (optional)

- 1½ cups powdered sugar
- 2 teaspoons orange zest, finely grated
- 2 to 3 tablespoons fresh orange juice, strained

1. Position a rack in middle of oven and preheat to 350°F. Grease two 8-inch loaf pans.
2. For the ganache: Heat cream until small bubbles appear around edge. Remove from heat, add chocolate chips, and shake pan to level chocolate. Set aside for 2 minutes. Stir until smooth and set aside.
3. For the quick bread: Whisk together flour, salt, baking powder, and sugar in a large bowl.
4. In a small, deep bowl, whisk together milk, juice, oil, eggs, and zest. Add to dry ingredients. Quickly fold and stir in until just combined.
5. Divide batter equally into pans. Bake 15 minutes then open oven, pull out rack without joggling too much, and quickly dribble about ¼ cup ganache over batter in each pan. (If ganache has become too firm to dribble, set bowl in a bowl of warm water for a few seconds to melt. Stir to smooth again.)
6. Gently slide rack back in and bake 20 minutes, until quick bread is slightly shrinking away from pan.
7. For the glaze: Mix together ingredients. While bread is still warm, poke several holes in it with a skewer and slowly pour on glaze.
8. Cool bread completely before removing from pan. Will keep, wrapped in the refrigerator for 1 week and will freeze well without glazing for 2 months.



ORANGE QUICK BREAD WITH OPTIONAL GANACHE

NUTRITION

CHERRY & POPPYSEED BREAD W. ALMOND TOPPING:
PER SERVING: CALORIES 348 (119 from fat); FAT 14g (sat. 3g); CHOL 10mg; SODIUM 329mg; CARB 51g; FIBER 2g; PROTEIN 6g

DATE & PRUNE QUICK BREAD:
PER SERVING: CALORIES 399 (143 from fat); FAT 17g (sat. 7g); CHOL 43mg; SODIUM 136mg; CARB 62g; FIBER 4g; PROTEIN 5g

ORANGE QUICK BREAD:
PER SERVING: CALORIES 242 (81 from fat); FAT 9g (sat. 2g); CHOL 40mg; SODIUM 248mg; CARB 37g; FIBER 1g; PROTEIN 4g

APPLE, PINE NUT, & CARDAMOM QUICK BREAD:
PER SERVING: CALORIES 396 (154 from fat); FAT 18g (sat. 8g); CHOL 124mg; SODIUM 398mg; CARB 54g; FIBER 2g; PROTEIN 7g