



# Beautiful boat bread

Make a delicious loaf and other tasty treats in five simple steps. Lorraine Owen shows how

**M**any years ago, when we were cruising along the South West coast, we were anchored off Cargreen on the river Tamar. We'd run out of bread a couple of days before and so a trip ashore for a loaf was essential. Horrors – not a slice, a roll or a wrap to be had! I was desperate. I insisted we motor for miles upriver to Calstock in our aging Avon powered by an equally ancient Seagull, and the rain was hosing down. But my reward was a small wrapped plastic loaf, the nectar of the gods. I scoffed it as we motored back down river, the slices disintegrating in my hands as the rain continued to fall.

That was a lesson learnt for me. I've never been much of a baker but needs



To start, mix all the ingredients together

must, and I added bags of flour and packets of yeast to my list of stores. Over the years I have found that you only need this one recipe to make any number of variations of bread. You can add wheat

## Ingredients

- Half a 1.5kg bag of strong white bread flour (roughly half is good enough)
- Half a level tablespoon of salt (or to taste)
- Half a level tablespoon of sugar (granulated is fine)
- A glug of olive oil (or a tablespoon of soft butter – or anything that will keep the bread soft for a bit longer)
- $\frac{3}{4}$ pt (425ml) of lukewarm water
- A sachet of dried yeast

bran or oat bran to produce a wholemeal variant. My skipper likes white bread and I like wholemeal, so I mix bran with half the dough and make two loaves in one large bread tin. You can make plain rolls, seedy rolls, cheesy rolls, a pizza base – the list goes on. Nothing beats the smell of a full-blown bloomer loaf coming out of the boat oven, its crust crackling!

## Method

- 1** Put all the ingredients in a bowl and mix with a tablespoon. Keep about 4 tablespoons of water back until you see how the mix is pulling together. You'll soon start to recognise the 'feel' of the right dough mix. Just add more water (or more flour) until it all comes together.

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**2** Get your hands in and give it all a good mix. You want the dough to be firm, not covering your hands like glue. When the mix is right it will just lift off your fingers, and indeed off the bowl. Take the mix out of the bowl and start the kneading process. I just hold the dough with one hand and push the rest of it away from me with the other, stretching it away as far as possible. Then roll the dough up and give it a quarter turn. Repeat 10 to 15 times, by which time it should be nice and elastic. The height of the main saloon table is ideal for those of us with shorter legs – a much better 'kneading position' than the kitchen work surface at home.



**Knead the dough, adding small amounts of water or flour until becomes elastic**

**3** Put the dough back in the bowl and cover – I use a recyclable waste bin



**Place dough in bowl, cover and allow to rest**

liner or a large paper bag. You can use a damp tea towel, but that will be claggy to wash if it touches the dough. The waste bin liner can still be used for rubbish afterwards even if it gets some dough on it. Now, the dough needs to 'rest' while it doubles its size, and the ideal place is in a boat locker, particularly one above the waterline if you have a dark hull. It's draught that's the killer for the rising process. You can put a hot water bottle in with it if the weather is really chilly, but generally the dough will rise eventually regardless of the circumstances.

**4** When your dough has doubled in size, give it a gentle knead to knock some of the air out of it. Now you can add any variations – seeds, bran, or fruit for a tealoaf. Shape the dough to fit your loaf tin, or you can shape it into a roll to make a bloomer loaf, baking it on a flat tray. As long as your tins have a good non-stick coating you don't need to prepare them in any way. Cover the tin and leave the dough to rise again – between 30 minutes and an hour, depending how warm it is.



**The rested dough should double in size**

**5** Meanwhile heat your oven. Bread needs a hot oven, but about gas 7 should be enough because the space is so small. A large loaf will take about 40 minutes, but it's best to have a quick peek at 30 minutes to make sure the bread isn't catching at the back – you'll probably need to turn the tin round. I've always found the smaller oven on a boat bakes a better loaf than the larger domestic ones at home. The loaf is cooked when it has

pulled away from the sides of the tin, and it should just drop out when you invert the tin. Be careful – everything will be very hot. Cool your loaf on a rack – the grill pan, or the pot holder on the stove will be fine.



**Allow your loaf to cool on a rack**



**A finished bloomer loaf... just waiting to be eaten!**

## Top Tip

If your mix was right, virtually all the dough will come away from your hands and the dough. However, it's worth having some cold saltwater in your sink for rinsing your hands as you go along. I use a plastic tray to knead the bread on because I found that the bread dough will eventually take the shine off a varnished wooden table. Then you just leave your plastic tray and mixing bowl to dry and any remaining dough will just flick off with a tablespoon.

## Rolls and pizzas

If you decide to shape your bread dough into rolls it's the same process but the baking time will only be 10-15 minutes. Pull the dough into a rectangular shape and add a pizza topping – such a tasty hot treat if the weather is inclement, and lovely cold with salad on a sunny day in the cockpit.



**The bread recipe is versatile**

## My favourite loaf!

I've lost count of the hundreds of loaves we've enjoyed over our years at sea, but the one that gives me the fondest memories happened many years ago whilst anchored up in The Bag at Salcombe. I took a lovely crackly loaf out of the oven just before we loaded ourselves into the dinghy to visit the Pugwash Bar aboard the sail training vessel *Egremont*. When the bar closed we poured ourselves back to the boat. Flinging back the hatch the waft

from the freshly baked bread was intoxicating. My husband, nephew and I ate the entire loaf, with butter and homemade strawberry jam, and then slept the sleep of the righteous and the bloated. I wish my digestion could handle that now!

