

Artisan bread in 5 minutes a day – by Irina Just

(Taken from the book of the same title, By Jeff Hertzberg and Zoë François), St. Martin's Press

This book makes for interesting reading and offers several options, choices and varieties.

But here is my condensed version for making my daily bread:

In a 14-cup capacity container with matching lid (i.e. Tupperware) or bowl (with lid), mix together until well blended:

6 ¼ cups extra fuerte bread flour, unsifted

1 ½ tablespoons granulated yeast (2 packets)

1 ½ tablespoons kosher or coarse salt

3 cups lukewarm water

This makes between 3 and 4 loaves of bread.

Cover (not airtight) with a lid or a cloth (towel) and let rise at room temperature for 2 to 5 hours. You can bake bread right away, but it's better – and easier to handle – if you refrigerate it over night.

To bake, take one portion from its container and shape into a ball. Let it rest on a pizza peel or wooden board, sprinkled with cornmeal (called 'polenta' in Costa Rica), for approx. 40 minutes.

Preheat your oven and your La cloche* to 450° for at least 30 minutes.

*I ordered mine from www.breadtopia.com. They come in 2 shapes: round and oblong. Amazon also carries them. I do not know who else. These clay bakers are sold under the name super stone covered baker by Sassafras. You can also use a Dutch oven with matching, tight-fitting lid.

Even though the instructions that come with the clay baker say to season them, do not do that! Water and oil don't mix and the "secret" of this bread and its perfect crust and crumb is the steam in which the wet dough bakes. If you use a Dutch oven, designate it for bread only and never season or wash it. The heat burns off any residue so there's no need for cleaning.

Sprinkle dough with flour and slash (tic-tac-toe) across top.

Put the dough in your preheated cloche, put the lid on, and bake for 40 minutes. Remove the lid and bake for another 30 minutes.

Voilà! That's it!

The dough keeps in your fridge for 2 weeks. You can bake one loaf (small enough for 2-3 people) every day...or size your dough portions to fit your family's needs. You may also freeze this dough. To make it easier, divide the dough into portions and put each ball in its own container and freeze. Take a portion out before you want to bake, refrigerate it over night and bake the next day.

A word about the flour: You can use "Nacarina" brand flour, available in every grocery store. It has a higher protein content than regular "all purpose" flour and works well. However, I finally found "fuerte" or "extra fuerte" (I prefer the latter) flour in the Grecia Central Market (the bulk food and spice stall in the restaurant area of the market) which is the best for that type of bread.

Call José at 2444-0531 to special-order it; comes in 25 kg bags (you might want to consider sharing the 25 kg with a friend).

Happy baking and bon appétit!