

French Nut Bread

This dense, moist brown bread is one of the great breads of Europe. It can also be made with walnuts, almonds, or a mixture of nuts as well as hazelnuts. You could also use the all-American pecan.

Makes 2 round loaves:

2 ½ cups hazelnuts, (or other nuts) lightly toasted and skinned.

2 ½ cups whole-wheat flour

1 ¼ cups warm water

(105-115 degrees F)

2 packages active dry yeast

¼ cup (packed) brown sugar

1 cup warm milk (105-115 degrees F)

½ cup walnut oil

2 ½ teaspoons salt

About 3 cups unbleached all-purpose flour or bread flour

1. Combine 1 ¼ cups of the hazelnuts (or other nuts) and 1 cup of the whole-wheat flour and grind to the consistency of fine meal in blender or food processor. Set aside.
2. Pour ¼ cup of the warm water in a small bowl. Sprinkle the yeast and a pinch of brown sugar over the surface of the water. Stir until dissolved and let stand at room temperature until foamy, about 10 minutes.
3. In a large bowl with a whisk or in the work bowl of a heavy-duty electric mixer using the paddle attachments, combine the remaining 1 cup water, the milk, oil, sugar, and salt. Add the yeast and nut mixtures. Add the remaining whole-wheat flour 1 cup at a time, mixing with a wooden spoon. Add the unbleached flour, ½ cup at a time, until a soft dough that just clears the sides of the bowl is formed.

4. Turn the dough out onto a well-floured work surface and knead until firm yet still springy, 5 to 7 minutes, dusting with flour only 1 tablespoon at a time as needed to prevent sticking. Because of the whole-grain flour, the dough will retain a tacky quality. Do not add more flour than required, because the dough will get hard and be very dry.

If kneading by machine, switch from the paddle to the dough hook and knead for 5 to 7 minutes, or until the dough is smooth and springy and springs back when pressed. If desired, transfer the dough to a floured surface and knead briefly by hand.

5. Place the dough in a greased bowl. Turn once to grease the top and cover with plastic wrap. Let rise in a warm place until doubled in bulk, 1 to 1 ½ hours or longer.
6. Gently deflate the dough. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface. Grease or parchment-line a baking sheet. Knead the nut pieces into the dough. They will tend to keep falling out, but just push them back in. Divide the dough into 2 equal portions. Shape the dough into round loaves. Place the loaves on the baking sheet and cover loosely with plastic wrap. Let rise about 40-50 minutes, or until double in bulk.
7. Twenty minutes before baking, preheat the oven to 375 degrees F. Using a serrated knife, slash the loaves decoratively with 3 or 4 parallel gashes, no more than ¼ inch deep. Place the pan on a rack in the center of the oven and bake for 45-to 50 minutes, or until brown and the loaves sound hollow when tapped with your finger. Transfer the loaves immediately to a cooling rack. Cool completely before slicing.

(The Bread Bible, Beth Hansberger, First Chronicle Books, 1999)