

Carolina Gold Rice Bread, Country Style

Time: 1 hour active prep time over 2 days, 8 or 9 hours rising time in two installments, overnight fermentation in the refrigerator, 1 hour to preheat the baking stone and cloche, and 30 minutes to bake.

Long a staple of the Southern kitchen during our Antebellum era when wheat was costly and rice abundant—but today virtually extinct—rice bread has a close, moist crumb and a blistering crust. Historically, rice bread recipes contained just 20 to 25% rice or rice flour. That's because, mechanically speaking, rice needs a fair amount of wheat to produce a respectable loaf. We made rice breads with cooked rice, rice flour, and rice flour paste. Cooked rice made a spotty contribution; rice flour was too granular; rice paste, just right! Multiple trials later, we offer this fine country-style rustic rice bread recipe that uses a starter or poolish of wheat flour to build a basic dough, and the addition of rice flour paste. The bread has a crackling crust, a pleasing nuttiness on the palate, and a fine, moist golden crumb.

Equipment *Mise en Place*

For this recipe you will need a scale, a stand mixer with a dough attachment, a plastic spatula, a metal bench scraper, parchment paper, a sheet pan or pizza peel, a large pizza stone, a terra cotta pot (see Baking Remarks at right), an instant-read thermometer, and a cooling rack. A coiled basket Brotform or proofing basket is optional.

Ingredients

For the poolish:

5 ounces (1 cup) unbleached all-purpose flour
1/2 teaspoon instant yeast
5 ounces (about 3/4 cup) warm spring or filtered water

For the slurry:

3 tablespoons Anson Mills Carolina Gold Rice Flour
1/2 cup spring or filtered water

For the dough:

1/2 teaspoon instant yeast
3 ounces (scant 1/2 cup) warm spring or filtered water
15 ounces (3 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour
1 1/2 teaspoons fine sea salt

In Antebellum Carolina and Georgia, cooks prepared rice for the table every day. They baked bread with rice every day as well. Rice flour or leftover cooked rice replaced a portion of wheat flour in many bread recipes of the time. Wide ranging in its iterations—from sweet, enriched quick breads to rustic free-form loaves—rice bread was so pervasive prior to the Civil War that it's said there were as many recipes for rice bread as there were cooks in the South. Today, though hundreds of distinct recipes remain alive in the public archives, the bread itself has disappeared. No one is sure why.

Baking Notes

Weights are important in baking. We list ingredient quantities by cup and weight, but if you have a scale, please use it.

Regular unbleached all-purpose flour is called for in this recipe. Bread flour is too muscular and will not produce favorable results.

This recipe uses a small amount of yeast and overnight fermentation to encourage full flavor development in the dough. The dough is mixed and risen one day, refrigerated

Directions

1. Make the poolish: Combine the flour, yeast, and water in the bowl of a stand mixer and stir vigorously with a wooden spoon by hand until the mixture is shiny and well mixed and has the consistency of a smooth, heavy batter, about 40 strokes. Scrape down the sides of the bowl with a rubber spatula, cover tightly with plastic wrap, and let rise at room temperature until the poolish has doubled in volume and is bubbly and fragrant, 4 to 5 hours, depending on the ambient room temperature.

2. Make the slurry: Stir the rice flour and water together in a small saucepan and bring to a simmer over low heat, stirring constantly. Simmer until thick, glossy, and smooth, about 10 seconds. Remove from the heat, scrape onto a plate with a rubber spatula, and let cool.

3. Make the dough: Place the bowl with the poolish on a stand mixer fitted with the hook attachment. Add the yeast and water, and stir on low speed to combine. Stir in 2 cups flour and salt. Knead on low speed until dough is smooth, strong, and elastic, about 20 minutes.

4. Stir in the slurry and remaining flour and knead until smooth and silky, about 5 minutes. Remove the bowl from the mixer and cover tightly with plastic wrap. Let rise at room temperature until the dough has doubled in size, about 3 hours.

5. Turn the dough onto an unfloured work surface and shape it into a rough ball. Cup both hands around the dough and drag its lower surface against the counter, using friction to stretch and tighten the dough into a smooth ball. Place the dough on a parchment round, slide it onto a rimless sheet pan or flat plate, cover it with plastic wrap, and refrigerate 30 minutes to an hour. (The dough will continue to rise over this period but will become cooler and hold its shape.) Remove the dough from the refrigerator and reshape it. When the dough is properly shaped, its surface will be a taut, compact ball, about 6 inches in circumference and about 3 1/2 inches high. Return the dough to the parchment and slip it onto the inverted sheet pan or flat plate. Alternately, place the dough seam side-up in a floured Brotform or proofing basket. Cover the dough with plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight.

6. Bake the bread: Set one oven rack on the lowest position; remove the second rack. Place a pizza stone on the remaining rack and set a large, clean terra cotta pot on the stone. Heat the oven to 500 degrees for 1 hour. As soon as you have turned on the oven remove the proofed dough from the refrigerator, lift off the plastic wrap and re-drape it loosely over the dough. Remove the plastic wrap altogether about 10 minutes before baking. When the dough is ready to bake, slash 4 stripes 1/4 inch deep and about 3 inches long across the top of the dough with a small, sharp knife. Wearing long oven mitts, quickly pull the oven rack halfway out and transfer the pot from the stone to the

overnight and baked the next morning.

The biggest impediment to producing a decent loaf of bread at home is the heat loss conventional ovens sustain during baking. High humidity during the early phase of baking is critical as well. This recipe creates a cloche effect by using a large pizza stone and a clean terra cotta pot for a lid—a pot about 12 inches in circumference at the top and 10 inches at its greatest depth is suitable. To be effective, both must be preheated in a 500-degree oven for an hour.

To bake the bread, transfer the pot briefly from the stone to the top of the oven door, slide the dough onto the stone, and lower the pot over the dough to bake. If baked without a "cloche," this bread will have a tough crust and compromised height.

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open oven door. Slide the dough—and its parchment-- from the sheet pan or plate onto the stone and invert the pot immediately back over the dough. (If you have proofed the dough in a basket, invert it right before baking onto a parchment-lined inverted sheet pan or pizza peel and score the bread. Slip it onto the stone as directed.) Reduce the heat to 450 degrees. Bake 25 minutes. Remove the pot from the bread and bake the bread uncovered until an instant-read thermometer inserted into the center of the loaf registers 190 to 200 degrees, about 5 minutes more. The bread should be nicely risen and a deep golden brown. Remove the bread from the oven and let cool completely on a wire rack.

Makes a 2-pound loaf