

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 40 minutes to bake

Mechanically speaking, rice bread needs a fair amount of wheat flour to be good. (Rice has the wrong type of protein to create a gluten structure in which yeast can work.) Historically, rice bread recipes contained 20 to 25% rice or rice flour; the rest was wheat. Because rice is a harder than other grains, it shows fine granulation in flour form, making hydration tricky unless the dough is very wet. Rice breads have a close, rather than open, crumb. But rice does provide crisp, blistering properties to bread crust and moistness to its interior—and an appealing nutty flavor with hints of green tea.

We made rice breads with cooked rice, rice flour, and rice flour paste. After multiple trials, we offer this fine recipe, a country-style rustic rice bread that uses a starter, or poolish, of wheat flour to build a basic dough and the addition of a 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, a large pizza stone, a terra cotta pot (see Baking Remarks at right), and a cooling rack. An instant-read thermometer is also helpful.

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
- 3/4 cup spring or filtered water

For the dough:

- 1/2 teaspoon instant yeast
- 3 ounces (scant 1/2 cup) warm spring or filtered water

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

15 ounces (3 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour

1 1/2 teaspoons fine sea salt

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. Press a fist gently into the center of the dough to deflate it. 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, 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 easier to shape.) Remove the dough from the refrigerator and reshape the dough. When the dough is properly shaped, its surface will be a taut, compact ball, 4 to 5 inches wide and about 3 1/2 inches high. Return the dough to the parchment and slip it onto an inverted sheet pan. Cover the dough snugly with plastic wrap and refrigerate overnight.

6. Bake the bread: Remove the proofed dough from the refrigerator and lift off the plastic wrap. 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. Just before baking, slash 4 stripes 1/4 inch

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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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 open oven door. Slip the dough onto the stone and invert the pot immediately back over the dough. Reduce the heat to 450 degrees. Bake 20 minutes. Remove the pot from the bread and bake 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 one 2-pound loaf