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Source: Bernard Clayton's, "New Complete Book of Breads"
Recipe: Blue Ribbon French Bread

Ingredients:

1 package dry yeast
2 tablespoons nonfat dry milk
1 tablespoon sugar
1 tablespoon salt
4 to 5 cups all-purpose flour, approximately
2 cups hot water (120-130F)
1 tablespoon butter, room temperature
1 tablespoon each cold water & coarse salt

Steps:

By hand or mixer: 15 min. In a large mixing or mixer bowl stir together the yeast, dry milk, sugar, salt, & 2 cups of flour. Pour in the hot water & add the butter. Blend with 100 strong strokes with a wooden spoon, or for 2 minutes with the flat beater of the mixer. Stir in the balance of the flour, ½ cup at a time, first with the spoon & then by hand, or in the mixer. The dough will be a shaggy mass, elastic but not sticky; it will clean the sides of the bowl. If, however, it continues to be moist, sprinkle on additional flour.

Rest: 10 min. Turn the dough onto a lightly floured work surface & let it rest for 10 minutes

Kneading: 10 min. Knead with the rhythmic 1-2-3 motion of push-turn-fold. The dough will become smooth & elastic, & bubbles may rise under the surface of the dough. Break the kneading rhythm by throwing the dough down hard against the work surface. Knead by hand or with the mixer for 10 minutes.

By processor: 5 min. Use the steel blade. Measure the dry ingredients & 2 cups of flour into the work bowl. Pulse to blend. Pour in the hot water & add the butter. Pulse 4 or 5 times to mix thoroughly.

With the processor on, add additional flour through the feed tube, ¼ cup at a time, until the dough forms a mass & rides atop the steel blade as it whirls around the bowl. When this happens turn off the machine & allow the dough to rest for 10 minutes.

Kneading: 50 secs. Turn on processor & knead for 50 seconds

First rising: 1 ¼ hours. Place the dough in a greased bowl, cover tightly with plastic wrap to retain moisture, & leave at room temperature until the dough doubles in volume, about 1 ¼ hours.

Shaping: 15 min. Punch down the dough & turn it onto the lightly floured work surface again. Knead for 30 seconds to press out the bubbles, cut into 2 pieces, & form each into a ball.

For a round loaf, place the dough on the corner of a baking sheet or in a small basket, lined loosely with a cloth & sprinkled with flour.

For a long loaf, roll the ball into a rectangle, about 10"x16". Roll the dough under your palms into a long loaf which can be placed directly on the baking sheet or in a long cloth-lined basket. Later, after it has risen, it will be turned from the basket directly onto the baking sheet.

Second rising: 45-50 min. Place the baking sheet and/or the baskets in a warm place & cover the loaves carefully with a length of wax paper. Leave until the loaves have doubled in volume, about 45-50 minutes.

Preheat. Prepare the oven by placing a large, shallow roasting pan under the bottom shelf of the oven. Preheat the oven to 400F 20 minutes before baking. Three minutes before placing the loaves in the oven, pour 1 pint hot water in the pan. Be careful of the steam that will suddenly erupt.

Baking: 400F 45 min. (If using a convection oven, reduce heat 25F.) If the loaves have risen in baskets, simply tip the raised loaf into your hand & quickly turn the loaf right side up & onto the baking sheet. Brush with cold water & sprinkle with coarse salt.

With a razor blade or a sharp knife, slash the round loaves with a tic-tac-toe design, the long loaves with diagonal cuts.

Bake the loaves until they are golden brown, 45 minutes. Turn over one loaf & tap the bottom crust; a hard hollow sound means the bread is baked. If not, return to the oven for an additional 10 minutes. Midway during baking & again near the end of it, shift the loaves on the baking sheets so they are exposed equally to the temperature variations in the oven.

Final step. Remove the loaves from the oven & place them on wire racks to cool. This bread is delicious reheated. Place uncovered in a 350F oven for 20 minutes. It also keeps well frozen at 0F.