

Basque Shepherd Bread

This recipe produces a loaf of bread similar to the traditional style baked in a Dutch oven in the ground by Basque shepherders in the western United States in the early twentieth century. This bread is baked in a Dutch oven within a traditional home oven.

- Ben Plaza
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Ingredients:

6 tablespoons margarine or butter
1/3 cup sugar
2 cups hot water
2 teaspoons salt
4 teaspoons yeast
7-8 cups flour

Combine the margarine or butter, sugar, salt and hot water in a large bowl. Stir the ingredients until the butter is melted and then let the mixture cool until it is just warm. Stir in the yeast and cover the bowl, set aside until the yeast bubbles (about 10-15 minutes.) Add 5 cups of the flour, beating the mixture with a spoon, then knead in the flour with your hands or in a mixer with a dough hook until it forms a smooth batter. Add the remaining flour and continue to work the dough. It will initially resemble what is called a "shaggy mass". Keep working the dough (kneading or in the mixer) for 5-10 minutes until it becomes smooth and elastic. Place the dough in a greased bowl, flip over to present the greased side up, cover with plastic and then a towel. Put the bowl in a warm place and let the dough rise until doubled, about 1 1/2 hours.

After the dough has doubled punch it down and knead for 5 minutes. Form a smooth ball. Grease the sides and inside lid (important) of a Dutch oven. Cut a round of foil, place it in the bottom of the Dutch oven and dust with flour. Put the round and slightly flattened dough in the Dutch oven, cover and let rise until the dough just barely pushes up the lid (30-45 minutes.) Preheat the oven to 400 degrees and place the Dutch oven in the oven. Bake for 8 to 10 minutes and then remove the lid of the Dutch oven and reduce the oven temperature to 375 degrees. Continue to bake the bread for another 30 to 35 minutes or until it is golden brown. Remove the Dutch oven from the oven (use mitts - it is very hot), then remove the loaf from the Dutch oven and let cool on a wire rack.