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# Getting the Most from Your Bread Machine

**B**read machines are a true kitchen convenience. They automatically mix the ingredients, knead the dough, allow the dough to rise, and then bake the loaf of bread — all in the same unit. There are more than 15 brands and over 50 models available for sale. Basically, all bread machines are the same: they have a motor, bread pan, kneading blade, and built-in computer that controls the essential operations. The recipe ingredients are all added to a nonstick canister, which becomes the mixing bowl, baking pan, and oven. Be sure to follow the manufacturer's instructions for adding and layering ingredients. If you love the flavor and aroma of freshly baked bread, but don't have the time to spend on the art of bread baking, maybe a bread machine is for you.

## BREAD MACHINE BASICS

Bread machines are generally available in three size capacities: 1 pound, 1½ pound, and 2 pound. Some machines can produce all three sizes by varying the amount of flour in the recipe. A 1 pound loaf of bread will feed an average family of one to three people, so a larger family will need a machine that produces a 1½- to 2-pound loaf. The shape of the loaf is not the traditional loaf. Once the bread is freed from the bread pan, the finished loaf will have a small paddle-shaped indentation or hole in the bottom. The shape may be a vertically- or horizontally-oriented square or cylindrical loaf.

Most bread machines have different cycles for different kinds of dough. They may include white bread, whole grain, French, fruit/nut signal (which allows the addition of fruit or nuts at the appropriate time), and dough/manual (which is designed for pizza dough and shaped loaves to be baked in the oven). Some bread machines allow you to wake to the smell of freshly baked bread. The ingredients are simply placed in the bread machine and a programmable timer is set so a fresh loaf can be ready for breakfast. If you wish to make 100 percent whole-grain breads, be sure to buy a heavy-duty model. All bread machines can make breads using a mixture of white and whole-grain flours, but not all machines can handle heavier dough. Some whole-grain models can also be used to make wheat- or gluten-free breads for those who have dietary restrictions. Once you decide what features are right for you, check to see what brands and models with these features are available in your area.

## ADAPTING YOUR RECIPES TO A BREAD MACHINE

There are commercial bread machine mixes and cookbooks with specially formulated recipes just for the bread machine, but many of your family's favorite bread recipes can be made in a bread machine. The following tips will assist you in adapting those recipes.

- ★ Always follow the manufacturer's instructions to determine the proper order in which to add the ingredients.
- ★ Never use more than the maximum amount of flour specified by the manufacturer. You can however, use 3 cups of flour in 1-, 1½- and 2-pound bread machines when using the dough/manual setting.

- ★ A basic yeast, liquid, and flour ratio is 1½ teaspoons of active dry yeast and ¾ cup plus 1 tablespoon of liquid to 2 cups of flour OR 2¼ teaspoons active dry yeast and 1¼ cups of liquid to 3 cups of flour.
- ★ Use large eggs only. One large egg is equal to ¼ cup of liquid. Egg substitutes will work, too.
- ★ Always use active dry yeast in your recipe (unless otherwise specified). Check the expiration date on the package to assure freshness. Reseal the yeast tightly. Opened packages should be stored in the refrigerator.
- ★ Always use bread flour as opposed to all-purpose flour in your recipes. The higher gluten content (amount of protein) of bread flour allows the dough to stretch and rise for a better-developed loaf of bread. Spoon the flour into a measuring cup to avoid the formation of air pockets. Use the flat edge of a knife to level off the contents.
- ★ The liquid ingredient temperature should never be higher than 80°F.
- ★ Carefully measure all ingredients.
- ★ All ingredients should be at room temperature (68-85°F) unless otherwise specified.
- ★ If your bread rises less than expected or not at all, the yeast may have been past its expiration date; the liquid may have been too hot and killed the yeast; the ingredients may have been too cold; or the yeast may not have been added at all.
- ★ If your loaves of bread are wrinkled on top or collapsed, try lowering the water or liquid temperature and/or reducing the amount of liquid called for in the recipe by 2-3 tablespoons. If the dough seems too dry or the bread machine appears to be laboring during the kneading process, add additional water, a tablespoon at a time, during the first kneading until the dough appears to be elastic and smooth.
- ★ Flour will absorb excess moisture during periods of high humidity, so it may be necessary to lower the water content when making bread.
- ★ Do not use absorbable ingredients, like oats or coarsely ground whole grains, when using the programmable timer.
- ★ Homemade bread will not stay fresh as long as store-bought bread.

Anyone can become a master baker with the help of a bread machine and a good recipe. If you want to shape your loaf, allow the dough to knead and rise in the bread machine, then shape it and bake in your kitchen oven.

## REFERENCES

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Sandra Bastin, PhD, RD, LD, CCE  
Extension Specialist for Food and Nutrition

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