

Irish Soda Bread

Embrace the Emerald Isle. While all the amateurs are running around with green beer, make something that actually speaks of Ireland. As bread recipes go, this recipe is insanely easy. It gets its rise from the chemical reaction of baking soda and buttermilk. The raisins can be a point of contention among the Irish diaspora, so know your audience before you omit them. We love the sweetness they impart. An Irish-American tradition for St. Patty's Day, this loaf is made year-round in Ireland for any reason at all. Be sure to purchase good Irish butter to slather on top. Very lucky, indeed.

Ingredients

1 tablespoon unsalted butter, for pan
2 cups all-purpose flour, plus extra for kneading
2 cups whole wheat flour
1 teaspoon kosher salt
1 teaspoon baking soda
1 cup raisins
2 cups buttermilk, well shaken
Good Irish butter, for serving

special equipment

9-inch round, 2-inch deep metal cake pan

Directions

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Generously butter a 9-inch round cake pan.

Using a fork, stir the flours with salt and baking soda in a large bowl until combined. Add in the raisins, tossing to coat. Pour in the buttermilk while stirring with the fork, just until a rough dough forms.

Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface and gently knead a few times until the dough comes together. If it is sticky, sprinkle with a little more flour. Do not overwork the dough.

Gather the dough into a ball and place it in the buttered pan, pressing lightly with your fingers to fill the pan. Use a sharp knife to cut a large, deep "X" in the top.

Bake until the bread is lightly browned and the X-mark widened, 45 to 50 minutes. The bread should sound hollow when the bottom is lightly tapped. Remove to a wire rack to cool.

You're supposed to wait until it cools to slice it up, but in our book it's perfectly acceptable to sneak a hunk off while it's warm and slather with good Irish butter. The bread is best eaten the same day it's baked, but it will keep for a day or two, sealed in a plastic bag.

Cook's Notes

To measure your flour, spoon it into a measuring cup to overflowing, then use the back of a knife to scrape it level.

total time: 1 hour + cooling

active prep: 10 minutes

serves: 1 9-inch loaf

difficulty: *easy*