

Basic Whole Wheat Bread
Adapted from Better Homes and Gardens
Homemade Bread Cookbook
Makes 2 loaves

If you don't have 9 by 5 inch loaf pans, you can use a large baking sheet. Follow recipe directions for shaping and simply place the loaves on a lightly greased baking sheet, far enough apart so they have room to rise. Bake as directed, but for only 20-25 minutes.

2¼ cups milk
3 cups whole wheat flour (white whole wheat or regular)
2¾-3½ cups all-purpose flour, approximately
1 package instant or active dry yeast (2¼ teaspoons)*
2 tablespoons granulated sugar
2 teaspoons salt
1 tablespoon butter, room temperature

*Be sure you don't buy rapid rise yeast. That particular yeast only works in recipes written specifically for it. Look for instant or active dry yeast packets in the baking aisle of the grocery store.

Heat milk until very warm (120-130 degrees). It will feel very warm if you test it with your finger. If it is hot, let it cool a little before you use it. Combine the 3 cups whole wheat flour, yeast, sugar and salt in a large bowl. Add butter and warm milk. Stir vigorously until well-mixed. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let rest for 10-15 minutes. This will allow the whole wheat flour to absorb more of the liquid and help guard against adding too much flour during kneading.

Add 2½ cups of all-purpose flour gradually, about a cup at a time. The dough will become stiff and hard to stir. Continue to work in flour until the dough is firm enough to knead. You might need up to an additional cup of flour, but try not to make the dough dry.

Lightly sprinkle a kneading surface with flour. Turn dough out of the bowl onto the flour. Flour your hands and start to knead, adding sprinkles of flour as needed. If you are used to baking with white flour only, the dough might feel a bit rougher to you and not quite as bouncy. It is supposed to feel like that.

Knead gently at first: pull the far side of the dough toward you and fold over, pressing it away from you with the heels of your hands. Turn dough a quarter turn and repeat. When dough is less sticky, you can be less gentle. At first you might need to scrape your kneading surface with a rubber spatula if dough sticks. Add flour as necessary to the dough and your hands to prevent sticking. Try to add flour gradually, only until the dough doesn't stick to your hands. Knead the dough 5-8 minutes or until it is no longer sticky. It will become smooth and elastic.

Lightly grease a large bowl (at least 3 quarts). Place the ball of dough in the bowl and cover tightly with plastic wrap. You don't want the dough to dry out while it is rising. Let dough rise in a warm place until doubled, about 60 minutes. I like to use the turned-off oven with the light on. It gets surprisingly warm.

While the dough is rising, lightly grease two 9 by 5 inch loaf pans.

If you aren't sure if your dough is doubled, poke your finger into it at the edge. If the hole doesn't fill in immediately, your dough is ready. Turn the dough out onto your kneading surface and knead briefly to press out any large air bubbles. You shouldn't need any flour.

Divide the dough in half. Working with one half at a time, flatten the dough into a rough rectangle about 9 inches wide (as wide as your pan is long). Starting from one 9-inch side, tightly roll the dough into a cylinder. Pinch the seam and the ends closed. Roll the top side against the surface to smooth. Turn seam side down and fold the ends under slightly. Place in pan, seam side down. Repeat with the second half of the dough.

Lightly cover the loaves with a sheet of parchment or waxed paper. Let rise at room temperature for about 30 minutes, or until the middles of the loaves are about 1 inch above the tops of their pans.

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees while the loaves are rising.

Bake the risen loaves for about 30 minutes, or until they are golden brown and sound hollow when tapped with your finger. Check the loaves after 20 minutes, and tent loosely with foil if the tops are browning too fast.

Remove loaves from the pans and cool on wire racks. Try to wait at least a few minutes before cutting into the loaves. Ideally wait until they are fully cool before slicing. You are going to want to sample your bread before it cools. I know you are. That is fine, but be very gentle when you slice the warm loaves or you will crush them.

Store at room temperature in an airtight container or ziplock bag. Homemade bread dries out much faster than commercial bread. Slice loaves and freeze if keeping for longer than a couple of days.