

## BROWN BREAD

Yield: 2 loaves

Prep time: 60-75 minutes hands-on time

Total time: 4 hours

Some people might call this whole wheat bread. My Grandma Mabel just called it “brown bread.” I don’t have her recipe, so I created this one in her honor. Baking bread isn’t hard, but working with yeast does require some artistry. Happily, this is an easy, forgiving recipe, even for beginners. It took me years to perfect my approach to baking bread. If you’re new to baking bread, I’ve included detailed instructions and a few YouTube videos to help you along. If you’ve baked bread before, then you will find this recipe a breeze and won’t need anything other than the list of ingredients. Enjoy!



N.J. Mastro is the author of “Breadline” in *Feisty Deeds II* and learned to bake bread from her Grandma Mabel, who is an off-page character in the story. Mastro is also the author of *Solitary Walker: A Novel of Mary Wollstonecraft* (2025, Black Rose Writing).

### INGREDIENTS

2 cups Guinness Stout beer (or beer of choice; however, a stout or porter is recommended)

3 T dry yeast (this is a lot of yeast, but stout beer, whole wheat flour, and molasses are heavy)

2 T honey

¼ cup molasses (or ½ cup if you want a tangier, stronger molasses flavor)

1 T kosher salt

2 T powdered milk

3 T butter, room temperature (plus more for greasing pans and brushing finished loaves)

1.5 cups whole wheat flour

5-6 cups bread flour

- You can use all-purpose flour, but bread flour has a higher protein content, which creates more gluten. More gluten results in a better rise and chewier, crustier bread.

Pans: Two 8 ½” x 4 ½” x 5” loaf pans

### DIRECTIONS

The day before baking the bread:

1. Pour the Guinness into a 2-cup measuring cup. Set aside and leave at room temperature overnight.

Baking day:

1. The trick to making bread is to keep the yeast, therefore the dough, warm. Measure your ingredients ahead of time so they are ready to go. This helps keep the yeast from having to struggle.
2. Warm the Guinness in a saucepan on the stove until the beer reaches 130°.
3. Pour the beer into a stand-mixer, such as a KitchenAid, with the paddle attached. (You can make the bread completely by hand but expect to work much harder!)
4. Add the yeast, honey, and molasses.
  - a. Mix on low for a few seconds to bring the liquids together.
  - b. If you want to proof your yeast to make sure it's active, let the mixture sit for 3-5 minutes until it bubbles. However, modern yeast strains are strong and don't need proofing. If your yeast is fresh, don't worry; advance to Step 5.
5. With the mixer on #2, add the whole wheat flour, salt, and 1 ½ to 2 cups of the bread flour, mixing in just enough white flour until you have a thick batter.
6. When the flours have been incorporated, add the softened butter in small dollops, then increase the speed to #4 and mix for 3 minutes. This starts building the gluten strands and enables less kneading by hand later.
7. Gradually add the remaining bread flour using a large spoon or a 1/3 cup measuring cup, keeping the mixer on #2 until the dough becomes too much for the mixer and the motor starts to drag. (You won't have used all the flour yet.) Increase the speed to #6 or #8 for 5-6 seconds or until the dough comes together and pulls away from the sides of the bowl.
8. At this point, you could switch to the dough hook and finish kneading the dough in the mixing bowl. I like doing the final kneading by hand to prevent adding too much flour. Too much flour makes the bread dense. The remaining directions are for finishing kneading by hand.
  - a. Sprinkle some of the remaining flour onto a work surface and turn the dough out of the bowl to finish kneading. Also sprinkle the top of the dough with some flour, then push the remaining flour off to the side of your work surface.
  - b. Begin kneading, adding additional flour gradually. If you've never kneaded bread, for a quick tutorial, watch [this YouTube video](#).
  - c. Because you've done most of the kneading in the KitchenAid, finishing the knead will not take long, only about 5 minutes.
    - You may not use all the flour by the end of the recipe. Conversely, you may need more. Flour has a moisture content that will affect how much you will need on a given day.
    - A good way to tell if your dough has enough flour is to slap it with an open hand and hold your hand there for 10 seconds. If your hand comes away clean, the

dough is ready. If the dough sticks to your hand, gradually add more flour in sprinkles at a time and continue kneading.

- Another thing you can do, or in addition to the hand test, is to shape the dough into a ball. If the ball doesn't sag, the dough is ready. If it sags, the dough is "slack" and needs more flour.

9. Shape the dough into a large ball and place it in a buttered bowl, top side first to grease it, then with the seam at the bottom. Preferably, the bowl should be some type of crockware, like a large handmade pottery bowl, or manufactured stoneware. Cover the dough tightly with plastic wrap.
  - a. I don't recommend metal bowls. These do not properly insulate the dough from drafts.
  - b. I don't like plastic either, unless you have a plastic tub with a cover made specifically for raising bread.
10. Set the dough aside to rise in a warm place. I put my bowl on my stovetop with the overhead light on. The gentle amount of light and the plastic wrap create a warm, sealed environment for the bread to rise.
11. Let the dough rise until it doubles, about 60 to 75 minutes depending on how warm or cool your kitchen is. (Adjust your rise time accordingly if using rapid-rise yeast.)
12. When doubled, divide the dough in half. On a very *lightly* buttered surface, shape the dough into two loaves.
  - a. This recipe works best in 8 1/2" x 4 1/2" x 5" loaf pans. Using larger loaf pans is fine, but your loaf will be wider and have less height.
  - b. Shaping the loaves is, quite honestly, the hardest part for me. My loaves never look uniform and are sometimes lopsided. Trust me; no one cares but you. If you haven't shaped a loaf before, [this YouTube video is instructive](#). Note that she uses a floured surface instead of a buttered surface. I avoid using flour when shaping the loaf when making brown bread. The white flour can create white streaks in your bread.
13. Cover the loaves loosely with a sheet of plastic wrap that has been brushed with butter and set them in a warm place to rise for 60 minutes. Again, the light above your stove works beautifully here.
14. Halfway through the rise, preheat your oven to 400°.
15. When the dough has doubled, bake the loaves for 10 minutes at 400°, then reduce the oven temperature to 375° for an additional 25 minutes.
  - a. Baking time will vary by oven. If the tops of your bread start to brown too much, loosely cover them with a sheet of aluminum foil. Do this quickly so you don't lose too much heat from your oven. Anytime you open the door you lose heat, so keep the door closed as much as possible.
  - b. Your bread is done when the center of the loaf reaches 190-200°F or you tap the bottom and the loaf sounds hollow and feels light.
16. Turn the loaves out of the pan and place on a cooling rack.
17. Brush the tops of the loaves with butter right away. This makes the crust soft and sweet.

18. Cool the loaves for at least 45 minutes before slicing. While cooling, the bread is still baking, and you don't want to release the steam too early. If you do, the texture of your bread will be gummy inside.
19. This bread is perfect the day it is baked and somewhat good the next day, but it dries after that. When the bread is dry, it still toasts beautifully, however, such as on the second and third days.
20. Store your loaves in the freezer in an appropriately sized freezer bag for up to 2-3 months.

