Bread & baking / Ireland

Irish Soda Bread

Forty minutes from flour to table — no yeast, no kneading, no waiting — just the fizzing reaction of baking soda against buttermilk lifting the dough into a rustic, crumb-strewn loaf with a thick crust and a tender, slightly sour interior that pulls apart in satisfying chunks.

Time 60 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 100 % Whole wheat flour (or half white, half wholemeal)
- ☐ 75 % Buttermilk, cold
- ☐ 2 % Baking soda (bicarbonate of soda)
- ☐ 2 % Fine sea salt
- ☐ 5 % Cold unsalted butter, cubed (optional, for richness)

Let's make it.

01 Preheat the oven to 220°C (425°F). In a large bowl, whisk together the flour, baking soda, and salt until evenly combined. If using butter, rub it into the flour using your fingertips until the mixture resembles coarse breadcrumbs. Work quickly — you do not want the butter to melt from the heat of your hands. The dry mix should be aerated and loose.

02 Make a well in the center of the dry mix. Pour in all the cold buttermilk at once. Using a large fork or your hand held flat like a paddle, stir in large circular motions from the inside out — 15 to 20 strokes maximum. Stop as soon as the dough just comes together. It will be shaggy, rough, and slightly sticky — this is correct. Over-mixing develops gluten and toughens the crumb fatally. The reaction between the soda and buttermilk has already begun.

03 Turn the dough onto a lightly floured surface and shape quickly and gently into a round about 20cm in diameter and 5cm thick — use the minimum number of touches needed. Place on a parchment-lined baking tray. Using a sharp knife or blade, cut a deep cross into the top, nearly all the way through — this allows heat to penetrate the dense interior and is said traditionally to let the fairies out. Dust lightly with flour.

04 Bake at 220°C (425°F) for 20 minutes. Without opening the oven, reduce the temperature to 200°C (390°F) and bake for a further 20–25 minutes. To test doneness, lift the loaf and tap the base firmly with your knuckle — a fully baked soda bread sounds hollow, like an empty wooden box. If it sounds dense and dull, return to the oven for 5 more minutes base-side up. Cool on a wire rack for at least 20 minutes before cutting.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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