

Country loaf

1 heaping tablespoon of dry yeast

1 tablespoon kosher salt

36 oz all-purpose flour (up to half can be whole wheat flour)

3 ½ cups very hot tap water (about 120 degrees)

In a large plastic or glass bowl with a lid, whisk yeast, salt and half the flour until blended. Add the water. Whisk together thoroughly, then add remaining flour and stir with a wooden spoon until dough comes together. Completely incorporate all the flour around the sides and bottom of the bowl.

Cover loosely with lid and set on counter for 2 hours while it rises. Place covered bowl in refrigerator overnight. This dough will keep in the refrigerator up to 2 weeks.

When you are ready to bake a loaf of bread, scoop out one quarter of the dough in the bowl. Dust with flour and fold dough over on itself, forming it into a ball.

Sprinkle cornmeal on a baking sheet or line it with parchment paper and set the ball on it. Tear off most of the parchment paper so it doesn't flap around in the oven. Dust the loaf lightly with flour, cover with a tea towel and let rest for 20 minutes.

To create the steam for a crisp crust, place an empty metal broiler pan in the bottom of the oven. Heat oven to 450 degrees. When the oven is at temperature, slash the top of the loaf twice and place the baking sheet on the middle rack.

Quickly pour 2 cups of water into the empty broiler pan. Close the oven quickly to release the steam into the oven. Bake for 30-35 minutes, until loaf is golden brown on top and sounds hollow on bottom.

Remove to a cooling rack until completely cool before slicing and serving. This loaf will keep just a few days, so only make as much at a time as you can use (or make more loaves and freeze them) but if it goes stale, it also makes delicious bread pudding, croutons and bread crumbs. The batter itself will keep up to 2 weeks in the refrigerator before baking, gradually becoming more of a sourdough flavor.

