

Olive Bread

Makes 2 Round Loaves

Flavorful olives stud this bread, making it moist and rich tasting. The bread is a great accompaniment to a simple green salad. You can change the character of the loaf by using different types of olives, such as Gaeta, or by using a mixture of olives.

3 packages (7 ½ tsp) active dry yeast
2 cups warm water
2/3 c extra virgin olive oil
2 cups bread flour
4 cups all-purpose flour, plus extra for kneading and dusting the loaves
1 tbs sea salt *I used half
2 cups Kalamata olives, pitted and coarsely chopped

By Hand: In a large bowl, dissolve the yeast in the warm water and let stand until foamy, about 5 minutes. Add the oil, the flours, and the salt and stir in with your hand or a wooden spoon until a rough ball forms. Using a plastic pastry scraper, scrape the dough out of the bowl onto a lightly floured work surface. Knead until it is smooth and elastic, dusting the work surface with the flour to keep it from sticking, 5 – 7 minutes.

By Stand Mixer: In the 5-qt (5-l) bowl of a stand mixer, dissolve the yeast in the warm water and let stand until foamy, about 5 minutes. Add the oil, the flours, and the salt. Place the bowl on the mixer, attach the dough hook, and knead on low speed. Add a little flour as needed for the dough to come away from the sides of the bowl after a few minutes. Knead until the dough is smooth and elastic, 5 – 7 minutes. Remove the dough from the bowl.

Sprinkle the olives over the top of the dough and knead them into the dough briefly and gently. Form the dough into a ball and transfer it to a lightly oiled bowl. Cover the bowl with a damp kitchen towel and leave the dough to rise in a warm, draft-free spot until it doubles in bulk, 1 – 1½ hours.

Punch down the dough and turn it out onto a lightly floured work surface. Knead it briefly and gently to disperse the olives evenly. Using a sharp knife or a bench scraper, cut it in half. Cover with a kitchen towel and let rest for 5 minutes before shaping. Line a half-sheet pan or rimless baking sheet with parchment (baking) paper. Shape each half of the dough into a tight round loaf by rotating the bread in a circular motion on the work surface between your hands. If any olives fall out while shaping, just tuck them back into the underside of the round. Put the loaves on the prepared pan, spacing them generously apart. Cover the loaves loosely with a kitchen towel and let them rise in a warm, draft-free spot until they double in size, 30 – 40 minutes.

Position a rack in the lower third of the oven, and preheat to 450° F. Lightly dust the tops of the loaves with flour. Using a serrated knife, slash a half crescent from one end of the loaf to the other, just off-center. Put the pans into the oven and reduce the heat to 425° F. Bake the breads until they are golden brown and sound hollow when tapped on the bottom, 35 – 40 minutes. Transfer to wire racks and let cool for at least 45 minutes.

Variations:

Walnut Bread

Use walnut oil instead of olive oil, and substitute 2 c walnut pieces, toasted, for the olives.

Hazelnut-Fig Bread

Use hazelnut oil instead of olive oil. Plump 1 c chopped dried figs in hot water. Substitute 1 c skinned, toasted hazelnut (filbert) pieces for the olives. Drain the figs and add them when working the nuts into the dough.

Pine Nut – Asiago Bread

Substitute 1 c pine nuts, toasted, and 1 c coarsely shredded Asiago cheese for the olives.

Rosemary-Feta Olive Bread

Add 2 tsp finely chopped fresh rosemary and 2 tsp coarsely ground pepper with the salt. Reduce olives to 1 c and chop them finer. Add 1 c crumbled feta cheese to the dough with the olives.