

Mr. Murray's Honey-Oat Bread (for 2 loaves)

3 tablespoons sugar

4 teaspoons salt

1 egg (optional) – keeps it from crumbling

2 packages of active dry yeast (1 tbsp)

2¼ cups milk

1/3 cup olive oil (butter or other oil)

1/3 cup honey

Rolled oats (don't need oat flour)

Bread flour

1. Heat the milk, oil, and honey in a sauce pan to 120-125° (use a thermometer to be sure: too hot will kill the yeast; too cold will not activate it). Start this beforehand, because it takes some time. (Watch it carefully, if it gets too hot it will take a long time to cool down, which wastes time.)
2. Everything else is mixed in a large mixing bowl (or a standing mixer). Start by putting 1 cup of oats and 1 cup of bread flour and the other ingredients in the bowl. When the wet ingredients are at proper temperature, mix them **very slowly** into the mixing bowl with the mixer at low speed while adding flour and oats in a 1 to 1 ratio (about a ½ cup at a time) until you can't use the mixer anymore. (If you add the liquid too quickly you will kill the yeast).
3. Pour the mix onto a flour-covered counter (or kneading board). (Now comes the only part requiring finesse.) Knead the bread while continuing to add equal parts of bread flour and oats. Stop when the dough feels ... like bread dough (pliable, but soft). You should knead it for at least 10 minutes. If using a standing mixer, end by hand to check consistency – the mixer will do most of the kneading.
4. Split the dough into 2 equal parts. Using a rolling pin, roll each of these into large rectangles (actually, you will find that the shape does not need to be anywhere close to a rectangle [except when making cinnamon rolls]). Roll each rectangle into a loaf and place into a loaf pan, seam-side down. (Before you roll it, you can add fresh raisins and cinnamon for great raisin bread OR put butter, brown sugar and cinnamon for cinnamon rolls.)
5. Let the bread rise. Best method is to put the loaves into the oven with a pan of boiling water on the shelf below the pans for moisture (this is called proofing). Close the oven door and wait. How long? Could be an hour, 2 hours or more depending on the yeast and other factors. (Some bakers like more yeasty bread and will let the bread rise one more time and then make the loaves, but you don't need to – this way tastes great and is much faster.)
6. When the loaves have risen sufficiently (when they look like loaves) take out the pan of water and turn on the oven to 250°, leaving the loaves in the oven. (You don't need to pre-heat the oven – trust me on this☺.) After 20 minutes, raise the temperature to 325° for 20 min, leaving the loaves in the oven. (Keep an eye on the bread for the last 10 minutes in case your oven is hotter – burned bread isn't so good.)
7. Check the loaves for doneness by using a toothpick. (Or cut one of them open, which is what I often end up doing.) Serve with butter and cold milk. Enjoy!

Tip 1: This bread freezes well. I always do a double or triple batch and freeze the leftover loaves (the ones I don't eat right out of the oven.☺)

Tip 2: Making bread is time intensive only twice: mixing and making loaves. After that it's all waiting. So start the bread, go run errands, come back and bake! Great bread – little time.

Tip 3: Bread is VERY forgiving. Don't think every little mistake will ruin the bread. I've even left the oven on too long before rising, precooking the bread, and it survived! HOWEVER, the **only** unrecoverable mistake I've found is forgetting the salt. The bread will rise very nicely, but taste like a batch of beer – nasty!