

IRISH soda bread

Kate Lynch



Soda bread was not a tradition in the Irish-American family I grew up in, although my mother experimented with it a couple of times. Irish soda bread dates to post-famine years, which would account for why it was not a tradition in the Lynch or Doyle families (my mother was a Doyle). Both sides of my family emigrated to the United States during the potato famine.

The Irish started using bicarbonate of soda (or bread soda) in the late-1840s as a leavening agent for the “soft” wheat that grows in Ireland.

It is really a plain and simple bread: flour, baking soda, salt, and soured milk (buttermilk). If the recipe calls for sugar or (heaven forbid) orange

zest, it isn't traditional soda bread. It also doesn't use eggs. Mine is an adaptation of the traditional recipe.

When I traveled in Ireland in 1984, all of the bed-and-breakfast establishments served “brown bread” (whole wheat) and sometimes a mix of white and brown bread – but always soda bread. For breakfast or tea, it would be served with butter and orange marmalade or maybe some lemon curd. Plain and simple, like all Irish cooking. Purists can visit the Society for the Preservation of Irish Soda Bread website: www.sodabread.info.

Kate's Brown & Tan Irish Soda Bread

makes 2 loaves

1 ¾ cups buttermilk
1 egg
1 teaspoon baking soda
3 teaspoons baking powder
1 ¼ teaspoon salt
2 cups unbleached white flour
2 cups whole wheat flour
¼ teaspoon ground cardamom or coriander

VARIATIONS

Add a cup or raisins or currants. In Ireland, this would be called Spotted Dog.

I like to kick it up a notch and add a small can of diced jalapeños. Think of it as soda with a kick.

1. Sift together all dry ingredients in large mixing bowl.
2. Beat buttermilk with the egg and stir into flour mixture.
3. Turn out the dough on a lightly floured surface and knead it for a few minutes until the dough is smooth.
4. Divide dough in half and form into two flattened rounds.
5. Place each in a greased cake or pie pan.
6. Cut two slashes, ½ inch deep, in the top of each loaf.
7. Bake 35-40 minutes at 375 degrees F.
8. Serve bread warm but not hot.

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