

Farmhouse White Bread with Cardamon

Known for years around the house as Judy Larsen's Mother's White Bread from Sweden, this was the first bread I mastered over twenty years ago and might be considered ground zero for my breadmaking skills. You won't believe how great the texture and flavor is. You need the whole white cardamom pods here, which is a bit of an adventure in itself crushing them. I remember how happy I was when Amanda Hesser, originally one of my testers way back when, made this loaf and reviewed it favorably for the New York Times. This country white bread from the heartland is perfect for beginning bakers, and it makes 4 big loaves: one to eat immediately, one for the next day's sandwiches and toast, one to give away, and one for the freezer. Judy used to bring me a loaf whenever she came for dinner and it never failed to be absolutely perfect. It may also be made into 2 or 3 large braids drizzled with a powdered sugar glaze and decorated for the holidays.

Yield: Four 9-by-5-inch loaves

4 cups boiling water
1 2/3 cups instant nonfat dried milk
4 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 tablespoon salt
1 cup sugar
2 tablespoons (2 packages) active dry yeast
Pinch sugar
1/2 cup warm water (105° to 115°)
10 dried cardamom pods
About 12 cups unbleached all-purpose or bread flour
Rich Egg Glaze, page xx

1. In a very large bowl, combine the hot water, dried milk, butter, salt and sugar with a whisk. Stir until the butter melts and let stand at room temperature until lukewarm, about 20 minutes.
2. In a small bowl, sprinkle the yeast and pinch of sugar over the warm water. Stir to dissolve and let stand until foamy, about 10 minutes. Remove the seeds from the cardamom pods and crush with a rolling pin on a piece of waxed paper. Set aside.

3. Add 4 cups of the flour, cardamom seeds, and yeast mixture to the milk and butter mixture. Beat hard with a whisk for 2 minutes, or until smooth and creamy. Switch to a wooden spoon and add the remaining flour 1/2 cup at a time to form a soft, shaggy dough that clears the sides of the bowl.
4. Turn out onto a lightly floured work surface and knead until the dough is smooth and resilient to the touch but not dry, 5 to 8 minutes, adding the flour 1 tablespoon at a time as necessary to prevent sticking. Place the dough in a greased deep container, turn once to coat the top, and cover with plastic wrap. Let rise at room temperature until doubled in bulk, about 1-1/2 hours.
5. Turn the dough out onto the work surface and divide into 4 equal portions. Shape into rectangular loaves and place in 4 greased 9-by-5-inch loaf pans. Cover loosely with plastic wrap and let rise again at room temperature until 1 inch above the rim of the pans, about 40 minutes. Twenty minutes before baking, preheat the oven to 350°.
6. With a serrated knife, score the tops decoratively not more than 1/4 inch deep and brush with egg glaze. Bake in the center of the preheated oven until browned and hollow sounding when tapped, about 40 to 45 minutes. Remove from the pans immediately to cool on racks.