

## Taos Pumpkin Bread

(Pueblo)

Originally appearing in my first book, *Bread*, and included here with the addition of toasted cornmeal. A crusty, sienna-colored Southwestern bread with an irresistible earthy flavor, it is likely to appear for the fall harvest celebrations. Consider using one of the unique ancient squash varieties, such as the Acoma Pumpkin with its blue fruit, or Calabaza Mexicana, the long-neck pumpkin. Serve it with one of my favorite meals: baked pinto beans, grilled poblano green chilies stuffed with cheese, and watermelon. This bread is also good cut into thick slices and grilled over a charcoal fire or under the broiler and spread with Sage Cheese with Pine Nuts (page xx),

Yield: 2 round loaves

1 1/2 cups warm water (105° to 115°)

1 package (1 tablespoon) active dry yeast

1/2 cup packed light brown sugar or 1 cone crumbled *piloncillo*

2 eggs

1 cup pumpkin puree, canned or homemade (page xx)

1 tablespoon salt

1/2 cup fine-grind toasted yellow or white cornmeal (page xx), or *masa harina para tortillas*

5 1/2 to 6 cups unbleached all-purpose or high gluten bread flour

3 tablespoons *each* yellow cornmeal and unbleached flour, for sprinkling

1. In a small bowl or one-cup liquid measuring cup, pour in 1/2 cup of the warm water. Sprinkle the yeast and a pinch of the sugar over the surface of the water. Stir to dissolve and let stand at room temperature until foamy, about 10 minutes.
2. In a large bowl using a whisk or in the bowl of a heavy-duty electric mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, combine the eggs and pumpkin puree. Add the remaining water and brown sugar, salt, cornmeal, and 2 cups of the flour. Beat until smooth, about 1 minute. Add the yeast mixture and beat vigorously 1 minute longer. Add remaining flour, 1/2 cup at a time, until a soft, shaggy dough that just clears the sides of the bowl is formed, switching to a wooden spoon when necessary if making by hand.

3. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface and knead to create a soft, smooth, and elastic dough, 1 to 2 minutes for a machine-mixed dough and a hand-mixed dough 3 to 5 minutes, adding flour only 1 tablespoon at a time, just enough as needed to prevent sticking. Add enough remaining flour for dough to hold its own shape. Place in a greased deep container, turn once to coat the top, and cover with plastic wrap. Let rise at room temperature until double in bulk, 1 to 1 1/2 hours.
  
4. Parchment-line a baking sheet or wooden peel and sprinkle with the combination of cornmeal and flour. Gently deflate dough and turn it out onto a lightly floured surface; divide the dough into 2 equal portions. Form into 2 round loaves and place on the baking sheet. Cover loosely with plastic wrap and let rise 30 minutes, or until double in bulk. Twenty minutes before baking, preheat the oven to 450°, using a baking stone, if desired. Dust the tops of loaves with flour.
  
5. Using a serrated knife, slash loaves decoratively, no deeper than 1/4 inch. Slide the loaves with the layer of parchment, if used, directly onto the stone (the parchment is easily removed later) in the preheated oven, or place the baking sheet directly on the stone surface. Immediately reduce the oven temperature to 375°, and bake 45 to 55 minutes, or until loaves are lightly browned and sounds hollow when tapped with your finger. Remove the parchment and cool on racks before serving.