



Celebration Bread

Myth, Tradition and Art

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Celebration bread, edible folk art, is a forgotten art steeped in tradition that is being rediscovered today. Basic methods can produce stunning results. Even complex designs can be surprisingly easy to master. Whether you want to create a unique artistic creation for a festive event, a presentation for your bakery, or enhance a holiday table, celebration bread is a creative way to inspire through the versatility of bread and its roots in the earth.

In Eastern Europe celebration breads are baked for festive occasions, and embellished with decorative figures such as sun, moon, birds, animals and plants. Its origin is steeped in the ancient belief in the magical, life-giving properties of grain. Women prepared celebration bread for a wedding while singing traditional wedding songs at the new home of the couple about to be married. The bride and groom were blessed with it before their marriage ceremony. At the wedding the celebration bread was kept in a prominent place, and the bride was greeted with it when she arrived at her new home. After the nuptials, the best man served it to all the guests. Scholars consider the ritual of spring festive bread is an ancient tradition that evolved into collective communion.

Arab culture's tradition of eating "bread and salt" creates an alliance by eating together, building a feeling of honoring which generates gratitude and trust.

In Hebraic traditions from the earliest days, bread was an expression of the feminine nurturing Shehina spirit, an offering in the desert Mishkon (Tabernacle) called 'Bread of the Face', in the Jerusalem Temple and on the weekly festive Shabbat Table today. Bread embodies the life-giving regenerative forces of Nature from field to table. It is common in Israel for a landlord to leave bread and salt in the home to welcome new tenants. Breads celebrate joyous occasions from weddings and house warming parties to childbirth.





Grain Mother Sheaf

In villages from Europe to the Mideast, the last wheat sheaf represented the 'Grain Mother'. Peasants believed that wheat field was animated by the vital spirit of the 'Great Mother' and at harvest time, the spirit still dwelt in the last wheatsheaf, picked from the finest seedheads, that was honored in festive harvest celebrations. In Ancient Israeli, barley sheaves were used for a sacred dance called 'waving the omer sheaf' in seven directions as a harvest prayer-attunement

The Grain Mother Sheaf evoked the spirit that makes the crop grow. At planting time she was brought to the fields to bring blessings to the crops. The fertilizing power of the Grain Mother was awakened by scattering her seeds with the newly planted grain. After consecrations, she was ploughed into the field to enliven the new planting for a good harvest.

Celtic Traditions

'Let the people use this day to make offerings to the Mother Goddess river of their region and to bathe themselves and their farm animals in "living wild water" - a stream or a river, a lake, a pond or the sea. In every case shall offerings and prayers of thanksgiving be made.

The people shall make offerings to standing stones, dressing them with wreaths of new grain and flowers, placing first fruits at their feet. Let them cut a sheaf of new grain and set it afire in the ancient manner, burning off the husks. Let them grind the grain in a quern or a mill and bake a bannock from it saying:

*On the feast say of Lugh and of Danu, I cut a handful of the new grain, I purified it by fire,
And rubbed it sharply from the husk with my own hand. I ground it in a quern,
I baked it on a fan of sheepskin, I toasted it to a fire of rowan, I shared it round my people.*

*I went sunwise round my dwelling In the names of Lugh and Danu
Who have preserved me, Who are preserving me, and who will preserve me, In peace, in flocks
In strength of heart, in labor, in love, in wisdom and mercy, until the day of my death.*

Festival of Lunasagh, Maire
McNeil, 1948



Bread of Gratitude in Ancient Israel

And this is the way of the peace offering that shall be brought to the Creator. If he is bringing it as a voluntary thanksgiving offering, he shall offer ten unleavened loaves mixed with oil, ten unleavened wafers anointed with oil, ten scalded¹ flour flatbreads mixed with oil and ten loaves of leavened bread each equal in amount to ten of the flatbreads. If his offering is a free-will gift from the heart, it shall all be eaten within the time of one full day to celebrate and elevate the offering with the community.

Leviticus-Vayikra 7:10-11 and rabbinic commentary

In Ancient Israel, a fascinating tradition of celebration bread is recorded in the Torah. The 'Korban Todah' or Bread of Gratitude, was offered by a person who overcame great adversity, recovered from illness, was released from jail, or safely crossed the sea or desert. The Bread of Gratitude was known as a 'shelamim' meaning that it creates peace in the world.

Tradition documents that forty loaves of Gratitude Bread were to be baked and eaten in one day in order to gather a great crowd which would eat the breads. The breads, as part of a festive meal, were offered to the community to give thanks to the Creator in a public celebration, so that the miracle would be publicized with many people at a festive meal.

The offering of the Bread of Gratitude was known to be a sublimely joyous experience celebrated with the community of the baker. It was accompanied by a wine libation which was poured onto the altar. It is also written that songs were sung as an expression of joy, such as Psalm 100. This tradition continues to this day in traditional Jewish communities in the festive meal with song on the weekly Sabbath and times of joy.

Mishna Berura 1,14

<https://torah.org/learning/tefilah-korbantodah>

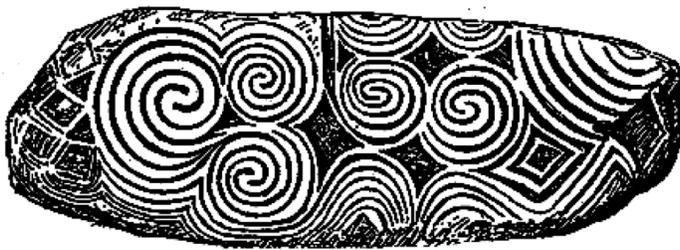
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¹ **Scalding of flour** involves stirring very hot water into it. The flour starch is gelatinised, imparting a softer quality to the fermenting dough and finished bread. Instead of being absorbed by the protein, the hot water is absorbed into the starch molecules. That leaves the gliadin and glutenin (the proteins in gluten) bereft of the water they need for strong gluten formation.

Decorative Breads

In Europe, bread traditions have been passed down from generation to generation as both a prayer-offering and a culinary art encompassing visual, texture and flavor modalities. Decorative breads have been crafted since the beginning of bread.



*New Grange Entrance Stone
Neolithic grave site in Ireland circa 3200 BCE,
older than Stonehenge and Egyptian pyramids*



Polish Wedding Celebration Bread

Ancient people experienced an encompassing connection between humans, animals, plants and inanimate objects. People were part of Nature, within the cosmos, stars, earth and life itself as part of a living whole. Bread sculpture with natural motifs, flowers, birds to this day decorate traditional celebration breads for weddings and holidays.



*Festive
Wedding
Breads*



Stencil

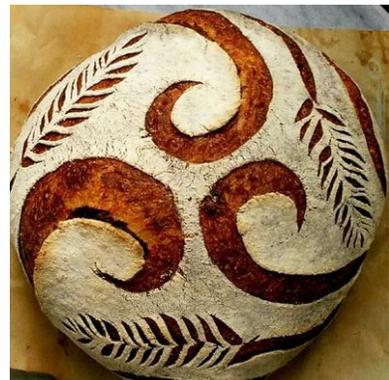
To stencil a design on your bread:



1. Brush off any excess flour on the dough.
2. Spray or brush dough with water. Dab away drips with a paper towel.
3. Evenly dust flour over stencil on dough.
4. Wipe with wet finger to work in flour for sharper detail.



Score



Tips to Score Bread

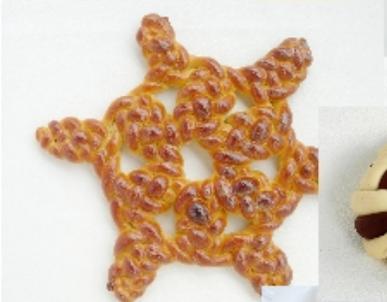
Turn slightly under-proofed dough onto parchment paper or preheated baking vessel. Brush off excess flour. Lightly shpirtz with water or coat on water with your hands. Use a fine-mesh sieve to sift flour onto loaf, tapping to evenly coat the dough surface. Use your wet finger to work in the dough for sharper edges.

White rice flour has greater tolerance to higher temperature than wheat flour. If you want all-white surface, use 100% white rice flour, or mix 50% with wheat flour for a golden hue.

Score deep enough to produce a clear line that maintains the structural integrity of the loaf. Smaller slashes can just break the surface along the sides of a deep cut for leaves or wheat stalks. If any sections are weak, lightly repeat over the same cut line to ensure spread in the oven. Chill the loaf in fridge for about 20 minutes before scoring to increase line clarity.

Professional bakers often score with a razor blade attached to a handle (lame). Or use a sharp knife, exact blade or box cutter. Slash cuts at a 90° angle for deep cuts and vertical cuts for leaves for a detailed score.

Braid and Shape







Braided Pesto Bread



priyaeasytastyrecipes.blogspot.com/2014/08/vegan-russian-braided-bread-with-pesto.html



Slather rolled out dough with filling. Roll up. Cut in half lengthwise. Braid tightly with cut sides up. Roll braids into ball, uts facing up. Put in round bread pan. Rise. Bake at 350° until golden.

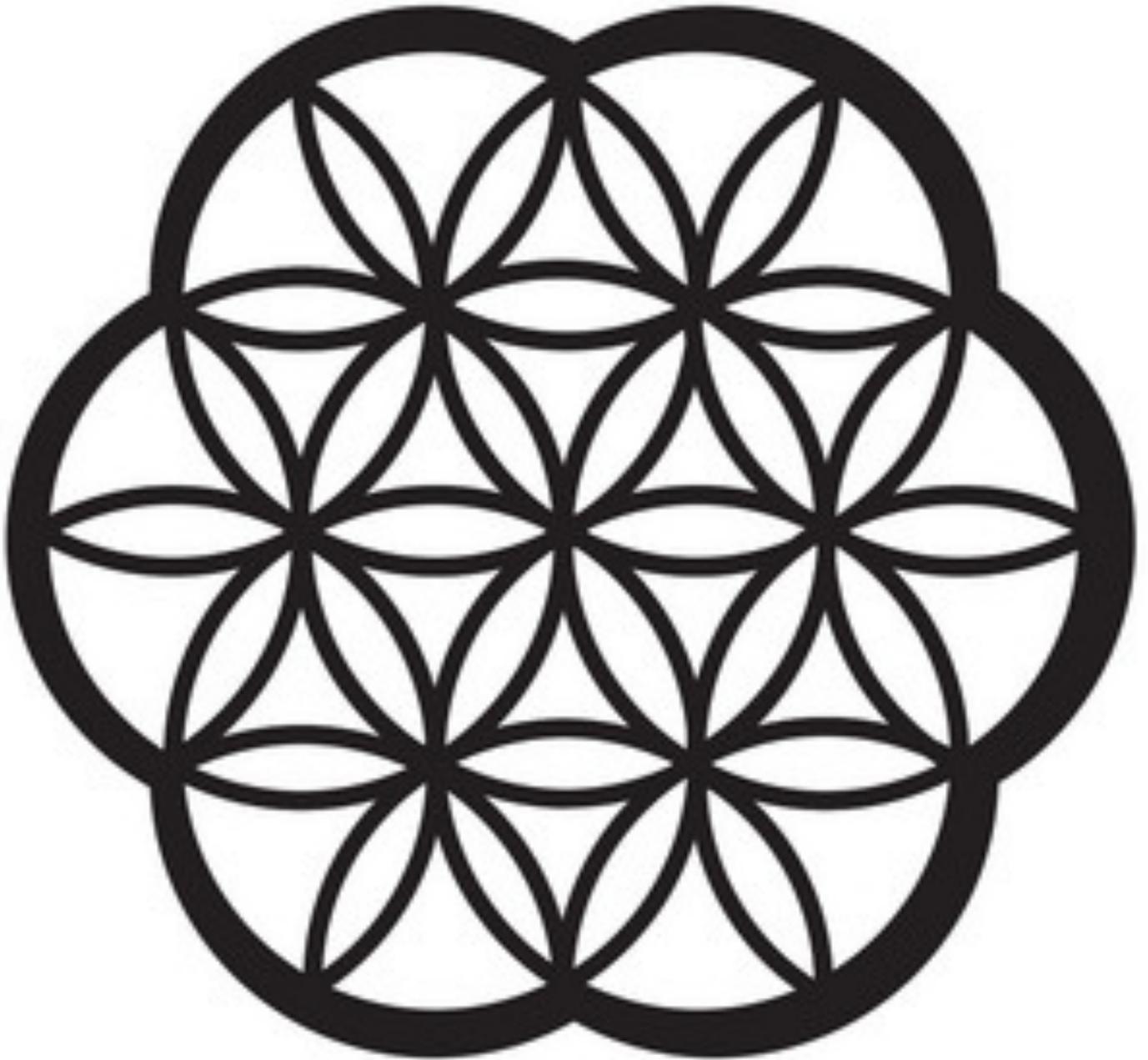
Pull-Apart Savory and Sweet Breads



World renowned bread artists such as Ciril Hitz, not only teach master classes in Bread Art at Johnson and Wales Culinary School, but enter their stunning bread sculptures in international competitions in Europe. breadhitz.com



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Recipes

Basic Sculpty Dough

1 1/2 cups flour
2 eggs
1 tbsp salt
3 tbsp sweetener
3 tbsp oil or butter
8g yeast
Warm water

Decorative Dough for Shaping

Ingredients

1/4 cup warm water
3/4 cup + 3 Tbsp flour (120 g)
2 tsp corn starch
2 tsp butter or oil
1 egg white mixed with a few drops of water for glazing

Alternative:

150 g flour
25 g heavy whipping cream
55 g water
Pinch salt

Directions

Mix dry ingredients. Grate in the butter. Mix in water. Knead until smooth. Cover with a plate and let it rest at room temperature 45 minutes. Glaze the decorations with egg white wash. Do not beat the egg white to avoid bubbles. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and bake at 350°F for about 20-30 minutes, or until the tips of the decorations turn light golden. Once cooled, re-glaze the decorations with the egg white wash.

Basic Bread Dough

Ingredients

500g Flour
390g Water
10g Salt
T Olive Oil
T Maple Syrup
1g Yeast

Sourdough:

500g flour
325g water (65%) or more
100g starter (20%)
10g salt (2%)

Enriched:

500g Flour
10g Salt
2g Yeast or 1/4 Cup Sourdough
15g Chia Seeds
440g Liquid with:
 First Add:
 T Olive Oil
 T Maple Syrup
 Egg
 Yogurt
 Then add Water to 440g
 Blend 15g Einkorn Porridge into liquid

Directions

Mix flour, salt, yeast and water. Cover and let rest 20 minutes
Fold dough. Cover and let rest 20 minutes Repeat until you have completed 4 folds
Cover dough and let rest for 12 hours at room temperature.
Transfer dough to floured surface. Form round and place in basket. Proof for 50 minutes
Preheat dutch oven to 475° F. Turn baskets over on a floured surface
Carefully place dough in dutch oven seam side up
Cover and bake for 30 minutes. Uncover and bake for 10 more minutes
Place finished round on wire rack to cool.

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