



Yuletide Rye Bread

To make one large (1500 g) or two small (750 g) loaves in tins

This is a festive development of the Raisin Borodinsky bread that I started producing at my Village Bakery in Melmerby soon after I returned – with sourdough and new understanding – from visiting friends and bakers in Russia in the early 1990s. Borodinsky is sourdough rye with malt and coriander; the raisin version was said to come from the Karelian region of Northern Russia bordering Finland.

Scotland The Bread organic rye flour is naturally 'malty' so this recipe doesn't need extra. I've substituted a small amount of honey (very traditional in Russian baking) but there's really sufficient sweetness for most tastes from the dried fruits. Unlike most Christmas bread recipes, this one has no added fat. As with German stollen, this bread will keep quite well if wrapped in parchment or waxed cloth or put in a polythene bag. As it dries out a bit (if you can resist it that long), it remains delicious when gently warmed, or spread with unsalted butter, or dunked in tea or coffee. At which point, if you are sharing, you might wish your *com-panions* a Happy Christmas, or in Russian 'S novym godom' – a good New Year.

To the practicalities: if you haven't got an active starter (preferably rye, but a wheat one will do) in the fridge, you can [get one](#) from the Scotland The Bread online shop or make your own in four or five days with the recipe [here](#).

Stage 1 Production Sourdough

- 85 g old active sourdough
- 250 g wholemeal rye flour
- 415 ml warm water (35°C)
- 750 g total production sourdough (PS)**

Ferment for 18-24 hours. Meanwhile mix and soak the following in a poly bag (shoogling a few times as it soaks):

- 75 g raisins
- 75 g dates (chopped)
- 75 g apricots (chopped)
- 75 g almonds
- 75 g Brazil nuts (chopped)
- 5 g ground coriander
- 10 g cinnamon
- 110 g hot water (or fruit juice, rum or vodka)
- 500 g total fruit and nuts**

Stage 2 Final Dough

625 g	refreshed Production Sourdough*
250 g	rye flour
5 g	sea salt
25 g	honey
5 g	cinnamon
5 g	nutmeg
10 g	cardamom
75 g	water
1000 g	total basic dough
500 g	soaked fruit & nuts (from above)
1500 g	grand total dough

* (the remainder goes back in your sourdough pot in the fridge)

Method:

Sift the spices through the rye flour. Mix with the Production Sourdough, adding the water once most of the dry ingredients have been mixed in. The end result should be a pretty soft dough – the texture of a thick batter. Fold in the fruit and nut mixture until well incorporated. Add a little extra water if the mixture seems too stiff (it is hard for the natural yeasts in sourdough to aerate a dough if it is too firm).

Using wet hands and a smear of warm water on your worktop, tip the dough out of the mixing bowl and divide it in two – if making two small loaves. (750 g may seem a heavy weight for a small loaf tin, but the fruit and nuts are $\frac{1}{3}$ of the mix and they don't expand as the dough rises.) Dip your hands in water and pick the dough up (a scraper helps here) and then shape it into an oval roughly the size of the tin. Smooth the surface with your wet hands and then slide the dough gently into the tin, trying to avoid touching the sides. There's no need to pat it down or smooth it out as it will find its own level during the final rise, which will take 3-5 hours depending on the vigour of your starter and the temperature of your kitchen. Keep it covered with something like a polythene bag to prevent the top of the loaf skinning over (which will also inhibit the rise), but try to avoid contact when the dough gets near the top of the tin. It will be ready for the oven when the surface of the dough looks a bit puffy, perhaps starts to break apart a bit, and doesn't provide much resistance when gently pressed with a (moistened) finger.

Bake at 180°C (fan) for 20 minutes, reducing to 170°C for another 30 minutes or so. The loaf will colour up quite a bit due to the sugars in the fruit, so you may want to cover the top after half an hour or so. But allow enough time for the loaf to bake through.

Optional festive glaze:

Warm a tablespoon of honey in a small pan and baste the top of the loaf well as soon as it comes out of the oven. Immediately sprinkle medium or fine coconut on top as a 'frosting'. (You can use icing sugar on a cold loaf, but it will soak in and disappear in a couple of days.)