

Strawberry bread recipe is loaded with fruit and spice



The batter for strawberry bread can be baked in regular loaf pans, mini loaf pans or muffin tins. (Sarah Conard/Special to the PD)

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QUESTION: I just love the strawberry bread at the Sunset 44 Bistro and Banquet Center. I have looked through all of my cookbooks and tried to duplicate it but to no avail. This is a dark bread. VIRGINIA DIXON

ANSWER: Bob Menendez, owner of Sunset 44 Bistro and Banquet Center, knows about breads. His house-made yeast breads are a highlight of every meal.

Menendez has trained his restaurant's bread bakers to start with a base formula, then add or substitute seeds, nuts, flavorings, herbs, rye or wheat flours, bran, etc. The result is an abundance of bread variations daily. In his kitchen, as with most professional bakers, measuring is by weight rather than volume.

Along with the recipe for his popular Strawberry Bread, Menendez has provided these quick-bread principles for banana bread, nut breads and other non-yeast loaves:

— All ingredients should be at room temperature. Ingredients that are too cold may cause the batter to separate.

— Grease the pans generously, then flour lightly.

— Sift dry ingredients together to remove lumps and blend them evenly. This will allow shorter mixing time.

— Mix the dry ingredients in one bowl, the wet ingredients in another; combine just before baking.

— Liquids should be added gradually to a batter, to ensure full hydration and complete incorporation of the dry ingredients.

— Any stir-in ingredients, such as nuts, are typically added last. Mix just until combined.

— Stir as little and mix as quickly as possible. That's because longer mixing develops the gluten, resulting in stretchy texture. (This would be good for yeast breads, but not for quick breads.)

Recipe: **Strawberry Bread**

Sunset 44 Bistro and Banquet Center

Yield: 2 loaves; 24 slices

20 ounces frozen unsweetened strawberries, thawed

2 2/3 cups (12 ounces) all-purpose flour

2 1/2 cups (1 pound) granulated sugar

1 teaspoon baking soda

1 teaspoon salt

1 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon

4 eggs, at room temperature

1 1/2 cups canola or vegetable oil

2 cups (7 ounces) chopped pecans

1. Generously grease 2 (9-by-5-inch) loaf pans with solid vegetable shortening; dust with flour and set aside. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.

2. Drain liquid from strawberries; reserve. Allow berries and juice to come to room temperature.

3. Sift together flour, sugar, baking soda, salt and cinnamon into a bowl.

4. In a large bowl, whisk eggs lightly. Whisk in oil. With a spoon or spatula, beat in strawberries and about one-fourth of the strawberry juice. Stir in dry ingredients. If batter is too dry, add more juice, a bit at a time. Stir in nuts. Do not overmix.

5. Spoon batter into pans, dividing evenly. Bake about 1 hour or until a toothpick inserted near the center comes out clean. If bread does not test done after 1 hour, reduce oven temperature to 300 degrees and bake until done. Cool in pans on a wire rack for at least 20 minutes before turning loaves out of pans. (Refrigerate or freeze leftovers.)

Tester's note: This batter can be baked into muffins or in mini loaf pans. Baking time will vary depending on the size.

Per slice: 335 calories; 21g fat (56 percent calories from fat); 2g saturated fat; 35mg cholesterol; 3.5g protein; 33g carbohydrate; 20g sugar; 2g fiber; 162mg sodium; 18mg calcium; 96mg potassium.