

Diastatic Malt article from Mother Earth News, 9/1/79

Sugar free Bread

You can bake flavorful loaves without using refined commercial sweeteners!

by NANCY M. HOCH

Although many North American cooks have never even *heard* of diastatic malt ... this healthful sweetener is one of the most important ingredients in just about every loaf of bread baked in Europe. Despite its imposing name, the substance is simply sprouted wheat or barley ... and it would be hard to imagine a better substitute for sugar or honey!

As you probably know, "sweets" do a lot more than just add flavor to breads ... such ingredients provide a necessary feeding medium for the yeast *and* act as browning agents, as well.

Diastatic malt handles these chores efficiently and is economical (*and* easy to make!) in the bargain. In fact, the flavorful grain even increases the nutritional value of bread (by adding enzymes and vitamins) and helps loaves retain their freshness. When malt is used in proper amounts, it improves both the taste and texture of "the staff of life" . . . while providing another means of cutting down on the use of heavily refined white sugar.

MALT MIXIN'

Non-pearled barley (the grain used in "traditional" diastatic malt) is difficult—if not impossible—for the home baker to obtain, so you'll probably want to make your sprouted sweetener from wheat.

Simply place one cup of the grain in a sprouting jar (any container with a capacity of five cups or more—topped with nylon net—will do) and cover the kernels with four cups of tepid water. After the wheat has soaked for 12 hours, drain it. (And as always, save this nutritious water for use in soups *or* in your bread.)

The sprouting process will take a day and a half to two days. During this time, make sure to rinse the tiny shoots three times a day to prevent molding. (If you set the jar by the kitchen sink, you won't forget to perform this chore when preparing or cleaning up after your meals.)

When your sprouts reach the "rootlet" stage (they'll be about as long as the wheat kernel itself), it's time to dehydrate 'em. Just spread the little plants out on a cookie sheet and put 'em in a 150 deg F oven for eight hours ... or until they're *completely* dry. Then grind the sweetener-to-be in a grain mill (or in a powerful blender): The end result will be inexpensive diastatic malt. (You can, of course, purchase ready-made malt commercially ... but why pay someone else to perform such an easy task?)

The prepared sweet grain should be stored in a refrigerated, well-covered jar. One "sprouting's" worth will last you a good long time ... because just *one cup* of malt is enough to sweeten approximately 150 loaves of bread! The basic rule is to use a *single teaspoon* of the dried sprouted wheat in place of all the sugar or honey that's normally required

in any four-loaf batch of bread. (In fact, too much of the potent sweet will overpower your mixture's yeast buds ... and the dough will become sticky and unmanageable.)

QUICK WHOLE WHEAT MALT BREAD

Measure 5-1/2 cups of lukewarm water into a large (six-quart) container. Add 4 tablespoons of yeast and let the mixture stand until the leavening begins to dissolve. Then add 1/2 cup of oil, 1 teaspoon of malt, 1/2 cup of gluten flour (optional), 2 tablespoons of salt, 1/4 cup of lecithin (optional), 3/4 cup of whey powder or dried milk, and 6 cups of unsifted whole wheat flour. Beat the ingredients thoroughly—with a spoon or an electric mixer—until a "spongy" consistency is reached, and let the dough rest for 10 to 15 minutes before stirring in 7 or 8 additional cups of unsifted whole wheat flour. Knead the mixture on a floured breadboard, and let it rest- again- while you grease your loaf pans.

Divide the dough and form it into 4 or 5 loaves (smaller pans will produce more "reliable" whole wheat bread). Cover the containers with a towel and put them in a warm spot to rise ... but *never* allow the loaves to reach more than 3-1/2 inches in height. If time permits, *remold* each loaf—allowing the dough to rise again after each shaping—one or two additional times: This process will produce a more finely textured bread.

Bake the delicious and healthful treats in a preheated oven—350 to 375 °F — for 35 to 40 minutes. Remove the finished loaves from their pans immediately . . . and *try* to avoid eating the whole batch while it's still warm and fragrant.