

## Ryaninjun Bread

When the Pilgrims arrived in America they brought with them the foods they were familiar with, but they quickly had to adapt to local conditions. Wheat was the preferred bread grain in seventeenth-century England, although other 'inferior' grains were often used locally. A mix of rye and wheat, called maslin, was sometimes sown and used for bread in Nottinghamshire. Despite initial prejudice against so called 'Indian corn', the settlers soon took to growing maize, both as fodder for their animals and food for themselves. In the 1660s, the New England wheat harvest was devastated by disease and the colonists increasingly relied on alternatives, such as maize and rye. John Winthrop Jr, governor of Connecticut colony, described how they combined maize flour with rye and wheat to make what was known as 'ryaninjun' bread – rye and Indian (i.e. maize). By this time, too, sugar production in the Caribbean was beginning to expand. The American colonies acted as a supply depot to the sugar plantations and received much of the molasses (a by-product of sugar production), which came to feature in their diet.

The following recipe has been adapted for the modern kitchen to give a flavour of the daily bread of the early New England colonists. The beer gives the bread an extra 'lift'. Despite this you will find this bread is much denser than you are used to, because maize and rye flour contain less gluten and you may want to experiment with more wheat flour if your initial efforts are too heavy!

150g (5oz) maize flour

250g (9oz) mixed rye and strong wholemeal wheat flour- use a country grain bread mix containing both if you don't have separate rye and wheat flour

1 tsp salt

1 tbsp molasses – black treacle is an acceptable substitute

15g (1/2 oz) butter

200ml water

80ml beer

1 tsp dried yeast

The above quantities are what I used in my bread machine at home. Follow the instructions for your own bread machine. If you are making this by hand then mix the flours with the yeast and salt, melt the butter and treacle and then allow to cool slightly before adding to the dry ingredients with the water and beer. Mix together before turning onto a floured surface and kneading for 10 to 15 minutes until smooth and elastic. Place in a lightly oiled bowl, cover and keep in a warm place for an hour or so until doubled in size. Turn out again and knead lightly before shaping and placing in a prepared tin. Cover and leave to rise for 45 minutes before baking in a pre-heated oven at 200 degrees/Gas 6 for 15 minutes, turn down to 180 degrees/Gas 4 for another 35-40 minutes until done. Of course, if you want to be truly authentic then you should build your own wood-fired oven, for which I recommend reading Tom Jaine, *Building a Wood-Fired Oven*.

Mark Dawson's food history website  
<http://mdfoodhistory.weebly.com>