

Apple Cider Cranberry Bread

This recipe is based on one I saw in Saveur Magazine (my favorite cooking magazine at the time). I made some modifications, and this bread is truly amazing. It's made in the Levain style, though I use my sourdough starter to make things easier. If you're not making a few loaves of this every autumn, you're missing out!

Make 1 sandwich bread loaf

Ingredients:

¼ cup recently fed sourdough starter, at room temperature
1 cup warm water - divided
1 lb, 4 oz bread flour – divided
1 cup (8 oz) apple cider, at room temperature – divided
2 oz dried cranberries
2 oz coarsely chopped walnuts (optional)
1 Tbsp kosher salt
Canola oil, for greasing
½ cup ice cubes

Method:

- Place ¼ cup starter in a bowl and stir in ⅓ cup water, 4 oz bread flour, and ¼ cup apple cider to create sourdough culture. Cover and let sit for 12–24 hours, until ready to bake.
- When ready to make the bread, begin by soaking the dried cranberries in the remaining ¾ cup of apple cider for 20 minutes.
- Uncover culture and add remaining ⅔ cup water, 1 lb bread flour, ¾ cup cider, along with cranberries, walnuts (if using) and salt. Stir with a wooden spoon until dough forms. This dough will be quite wet.
- Let dough sit to let flour hydrate, about 20 minutes.
- Transfer dough to a floured surface, and knead, using a bench scraper to help remove dough from surface, until smooth and elastic, about 5-10 minutes. Dough is quite sticky, so use flour on your hands – just enough to keep it from becoming a sticky mess, but no more than that! Dough will not be super-tight either due to its moistness, so look for the smoothness in the dough, and the elasticity in the form of a soft spring-back when poked.
- Transfer dough to a greased bowl; cover with plastic wrap, and let rest until slightly inflated – about 1 hour. Transfer dough to a floured surface and flatten slightly. Fold top and bottom edges toward middle. Return dough, seam side down, to bowl. Cover and let sit until doubled in size – about 3 hours.
- Repeat folding procedure, and place dough, seam side down, into a greased 8" x 5" x 2 ½" loaf pan, cover with plastic again, and let sit until dough reaches top of the loaf pan – about 2-3 hours.
- One hour before baking, place a cast-iron skillet on bottom rack of oven; position another rack above skillet; place a baking stone on top of it. Heat oven to 450°.
- Using a sharp paring knife, slash top of loaf. Place loaf on baking stone; place ice in skillet. Bake until internal temperature reads 180° - about 40-50 minutes. Let cool before slicing and serving.