

Helpful Baking Tips

Improving the Odds with Your Bread Machine

Bread machines are wonderful inventions but they can be a little tricky. The margin for error in most recipes is really quite narrow—even for those recipes supplied by the manufacturer—much narrower than breads made in your stand-type mixer or by hand.

Here are three rules that will improve your odds for making great homemade bread:

1. Always measure the ingredients accurately. Measure liquids in a clear measuring cup at eye level.
2. Always use water at the temperature specified. A few degrees makes a difference. Use a thermometer to measure the temperature.
3. Always start with both the machine and the ingredients at room temperature.

When you first use a new mix in your machine, check the dough ball. As the machine kneads, the mix and water should form a single ball of dough that is soft and tacky—not dry and hard or wet looking. It's called "the tacky test". For perfect bread from your machine in your kitchen environment, you may need to dribble another teaspoon of water into the pan or add a tablespoon of flour.

Your bread should be light and open. **When bread doesn't come out right, it is almost always a water problem.** If it doesn't rise enough, there was not enough water or the water was too cool. If it rises too much and starts to collapse with a concave top, the water was too warm or there was too much water.

To make homemade bread without the hole in the bottom or blocky-shaped loaves, do what many experienced bread machine users do: use the machine for mixing and rising but not baking. Many machines have a "dough/manual" setting. Use it and then form the loaf and transfer it to a baking pan or sheet.

To use your bread machine in this way, begin the mix or recipe as instructed. Let the machine continue through the rise cycle. When the machine beeps to signal that baking is to begin, gently remove the dough by inverting the pan over the counter. Gently knead the dough to release the trapped gas and then form the loaf. Bake as a conventional loaf, usually at 350 degrees. You will have tilted the odds back in your favor, you will have the option of forming loaves the size and shape you wish (or even dinner rolls), and you won't have a thick crust and a hole in the loaf.

You will find dozens of premium bread machine mixes produced by The Prepared Pantry. We think you will enjoy each of them.

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