

# WHY RYE?

It’s rich in flavour, but don’t treat it like wheat, **Laura Brehaut** writes.

“The way to be successful in baking with rye is to forget everything you know about baking with wheat flour,” Stanley Ginsberg says with a laugh.

“It’s important to respect rye for what it is, which is a completely different, quirky, stubborn, difficult but incredibly rewarding grain to work with.”

Rich in flavour and “loaded with minerals and trace nutrients,” rye is higher in fibre and protein and lower in calories than wheat, he says.

It has unique feel, fragrance and chemistry. And it behaves completely differently, from mixing dough to shaping loaves.

The award-winning author delves into the grain’s history and idiosyncrasies in his second cookbook, *The Rye Baker* (W. W. Norton).

From Nordic crispbreads to the minimalist loaves of France and Spain, Ginsberg shares more than 70 recipes spanning Europe and the United States.

Rye brings distinct mouth feel, taste, texture and appearance to baked goods. But it’s also notorious for being “sticky, unstable, (and) mercurial in the presence of yeast.”

Baking consistently good rye bread, Ginsberg says, relies greatly on understanding its chemistry.

Whereas wheat doughs are built on gluten, rye doughs rely on starchy gels (arabinoxylan) for structure.

Because of this, rye breads don’t require the same lengthy kneading time — these viscous gels form immediately when water meets flour. The baker need only ensure even hydration of the dough.

Another key difference, Ginsberg says, is that while wheat baking incorporates sophisticated shaping, rye’s nature simply doesn’t lend itself to the technique.

“I have a couple of very interesting French baking books and essentially, it’s the same dough. The difference in the various breads — epis, baguettes, boules, bâtards, tabatière and on and on — is the shaping technique,” he says.

“Rye is a whole different animal. It’s the chemistry that produces this incredibly varied spectrum of flavour profiles and nuances that

frankly I don’t think are possible, even with the most sophisticated chemical processes, to get out of wheat.”

A native New Yorker, Ginsberg grew up eating rye bread from Jewish bakeries in Brooklyn.

As the bakeries began to dwindle, he noticed that the full-bodied flavours of his childhood loaves were also disappearing. In their place were spongy, mass-produced ovals heavily laced with caraway.

“One of the things I’ve discovered is that people tend to be a lot more amenable to non-rye ancient grains, spelt and emmer (etc.). And I think a lot of it is because of what has passed for rye bread for so many years,” he says.

“For demand to grow — unlike a lot of the other ancient grains where people will approach them with an open mind — rye, for a good part of the market, demands re-education. And it demands opening minds that are ... better than halfway closed.”

Every loaf in the book has particular “quirks” of taste and technique that reflect its place of origin, Ginsberg says.

Rye was the principal grain across Northern, Central and Eastern Europe, and breads tended to be extremely localized; reflecting the agriculture, geography, tastes, and cultures of the immediate area.

“To me, (rye) is this incredibly rich historical and cultural and culinary experience that hardly anybody knows about,” he says.

“Each bread that I bake is a cultural exploration ... (Rye) breads aren’t just something to eat or something to bake, but they’re also a crystallization of a very particular time and place.”

**Note:** If mixing and kneading by hand, Ginsberg recommends ensuring the dough is evenly blended and hydrated: “No lumps; no pockets of dry flour.” Rye doughs are built on starchy gels (rather than gluten) and as such, don’t require lengthy kneading. Additionally, keep a container of water at the ready to dip your hands in when necessary: Rye dough is sticky.

*Recipes are excerpted from The Rye Baker by Stanley Ginsberg with permission of the publisher, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.*



“These are wonderful all-around rolls, equally tasty with cream cheese, jam, or butter or as a slider bun or dinner roll,” Stanley Ginsberg writes in *The Rye Baker*. PHOTOS: QUENTIN BACON/W. W. NORTON

## SALTY RYE ROLLS (SIGTEBOLLER)

**Start to finish:** 2 1/2-3 hours  
**Hands-on time:** 30-40 minutes  
**Makes:** One dozen 2 1/2 oz/70 g rolls

- 2 1/2 cups (625 mL/314 g) medium rye flour
- 1 3/4 cups (430 mL/250 g) bread flour
- 1 tbsp (15 mL/10 g) instant yeast
- 1 tsp (5 mL/7 g) salt
- 1 tbsp (15 mL/23 g) unsulphured dark molasses
- 1 1/2 cups (375 mL/350 g) warm (105 F/41 C) water
- Bread flour for dusting, as needed

**For topping:**  
■ 3/4 cup (180 mL/56 g) rolled oats  
■ 1 tbsp (15 mL/7 g) caraway seed  
■ 1 tbsp (15 mL/14 g) kosher salt

1. Combine the flours, yeast, and salt in the mixer. Dissolve the molasses in the water, then add to the dry ingredients and use the dough hook at low speed until the dough leaves the sides of the bowl and forms a smooth, elastic mass, 6-8 minutes.
2. Cover and ferment at room temperature (68-72 F/20-22 C) until doubled, about 1 hour.
3. Turn the dough, which will be soft, pliable and tacky, onto a lightly floured surface.
4. Knead gently back to its original volume and divide into 12 pieces weighing about 2 3/4 oz (80 g) each.

5. Roll each dough piece into a ball, press the bottom (seam side) into the rolled oats, then place on a parchment-lined sheet pan.
6. Cover and proof at room temperature until the dough has expanded to twice its original size, 40-50 minutes.
7. Preheat the oven to 375 F (190 C) with the baking surface in the upper third.
8. Slash the rolls once to a depth of 1/4-1/2 inch (0.6-1.25 cm), brush generously with water, and sprinkle with caraway first and then salt.
9. Bake until the crust is light to medium brown, 20-25 minutes. Let cool on the pan.

## SWEET LIMPA (SIRAPLIMPA)

**Start to finish:** 2 hours  
**Hands-on time:** 25 minutes  
**Makes:** Two 1 1/2 lb (680 g) loaves

- 3 1/2 tbsp (52.5 mL/50 g) unsalted butter
- 1 2/3 cups (410 mL/400 g) whole milk, at room temperature (68-72 F/20-22 C)
- 3/8 cup (100 mL/100 g) warm water (105 F/41 C)
- 1/2 cup (125 mL/150 g) light molasses, malt syrup or light corn syrup
- 2 tsp (10 mL/12 g) salt
- 1 1/4 tsp (6 mL/3 g) caraway seed, toasted and ground
- 1 tsp (5 mL/2 g) fennel seed, toasted and ground
- 1/2 tsp (2.5 mL/2 g) aniseed (anise), toasted and ground
- 1 tsp (5 mL/2 g) coriander seed, toasted and ground
- 6 2/3 cups (1.66 L/850 g) medium rye flour
- 2 tsp (10 mL/8 g) instant yeast
- Flour for dusting, as needed

1. In a saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat, then add the milk, water, syrup, salt and spices and warm to 105 F (41 C).
2. Put the flour and yeast into a mixer, add the milk mixture, and use the dough hook at low speed to mix into a firm, smooth dough, about 5 minutes.
3. Cover and ferment at room temperature (68-72 F/20-22 C) until the dough has visibly expanded, 40-45 minutes.
4. Turn the dough, which will be only slightly sticky and very easy to handle, onto a lightly floured work surface and divide it into two pieces weighing about 28 oz (794 g) each.
5. Shape each piece into an oval loaf. Set the loaves on a well-floured peel, if using a baking stone, or a parchment-lined sheet pan.



6. Cover and proof at room temperature until the first cracks appear on the surface of the loaves, 30-40 minutes.
7. Preheat the oven to 400 F (205 C) with the baking surface in the middle.

8. Bake until the loaf thumps when tapped with a finger and the internal temperature is at least 198 F (92 C), 35-40 minutes.
9. Transfer to a rack and cool thoroughly before slicing.



## NORMANDY APPLE CIDER RYE (PAIN AU CIDRE)

**Start to finish:** 3 1/2-4 hours  
**Hands-on time:** 20 minutes  
**Makes:** Two 1 1/2 lb (680 g) loaves

- 5-5 1/4 cups (1.25-1.31 L/650 g) medium rye flour
- 2 cups (500 mL/260 g) all-purpose flour
- 3 cups less 2 tbsp (720 mL/650 g) hard cider, at room temperature
- 2 1/2 tsp (12.5 mL/15 g) salt
- 1 tbsp (15 mL/7 g) instant yeast
- 2 1/2 tsp (12.5 mL/10 g) granulated sugar
- Flour for dusting, as needed

1. In a mixer, combine the dough ingredients and mix using the dough hook at low speed, scraping down the bowl as needed, until the dough becomes very stringy and sticky, 18-20 minutes.
2. Cover and ferment at room temperature (68-72 F/20-22 C) until the dough has visibly expanded, 60-90 minutes.

3. Turn the dough onto a well-floured work surface and sprinkle the top with additional flour.
4. Divide it into two pieces, each weighing just under 1 3/4 lb (800 g), and use floured hands to shape them into round or oblong loaves.
5. Set the loaves on a well-floured peel, if using a baking stone, or a parchment-lined sheet pan. Cover and proof at room temperature until the loaves start to show cracks or broken bubbles, 45-60 minutes.
6. Preheat the oven to 400 F (205 C), with the baking surface in the middle.
7. Brush the loaves with water, slash oblong loaves once or twice to a depth of 1/4-1/2 inch (0.6-1.25 cm), and bake until the loaf thumps when tapped with a finger and the internal temperature is at least 198 F (92 C), 35-40 minutes.
8. Transfer to a rack and cool thoroughly before slicing.