

FINNISH RYE BREAD

This is my adaptation of a wonderful loaf which comes from the equally wonderful Beatrice Ojakangas. It's dense, dark and aromatic in an extraordinarily comforting way. I'm not Finnish, and yet I warm to this loaf as if I were brought up on it.

225g rye flour	2 teaspoons salt
300g strong white flour	300ml warm water
7g (1 sachet) easy-blend yeast or	45g (3 tablespoons) unsalted butter, melted
15g fresh yeast	1 baking sheet
1 tablespoon dark muscovado sugar	

Put the flours, yeast, sugar and salt into a large bowl and slowly add the water, mixing with your hands or a wooden spoon, until you've got a messy but vaguely cohesive lump of dough. Add a tablespoonful of the melted butter and mix just to incorporate it. Start kneading, either by hand or with the dough hook, until the dough comes together smoothly to form a dense ball, adding more water or flour (and I use the strong white, not the rye, mainly) as necessary.

Use some more of the melted butter to grease a bowl and turn the dough ball in it so that the top is oily (and won't therefore dry out), then cover the bowl with clingfilm and leave to rise in a cold place overnight or for an hour or so somewhere warm.

When the dough's doubled in size, punch it down. This is never quite as satisfying with dense doughs as it is with white breads, but it's pleasurable all the same. Give a good few kneads, and then form into a round loaf. Sit the loaf on the baking sheet, cover it with a tea towel and leave to get puffy for about 30 minutes, during which time preheat the oven to 190°C/gas mark 5. Bake for 45–55 minutes, or until the loaf is cooked through. It should sound hollow when you rap it on its underside with your knuckles, and an inserted skewer should come out clean.

Brush with the remaining tablespoon of melted butter and leave on a wire rack to cool.