Grandma's Irish Soda Bread

Prep Time: 10 minutes **Cook Time:** 45 minutes **Total Time:** 55 minutes

Yield: 1 loaf

Irish Soda Bread is a quick bread that does not require any yeast. Instead, all of its leavening comes from baking soda and buttermilk. It's dense, yet soft and has the most incredible crusty exterior.

Ingredients

1 and 3/4 cups (420ml) **buttermilk***

1 large **egg** (optional, see note)

4 and 1/4 cups (531g) **all-purpose flour** (spooned & leveled), plus more for your hands and counter

3 Tablespoons (38g) **granulated sugar**

1 teaspoon **baking soda**

1 teaspoon **salt**

5 Tablespoons (71g) **unsalted butter**, cold and cubed*

optional: 1 cup (150g) raisins

Instructions

1. **Preheat oven & pan options:** Preheat oven to 400°F (204°C). There are options for the baking pan. Use a regular baking sheet and line with parchment paper or a silicone baking mat (bread spreads a bit more on a baking sheet), or use a seasoned 10-12 inch cast iron skillet (no need to preheat the cast iron unless you want to), or grease a 9-10 inch cake pan or pie dish. You can also use a 5 quart (or higher) dutch oven. Grease or line with parchment paper. If using a dutch oven, bake the bread with the lid off.

2. Whisk the buttermilk and egg together. Set aside. Whisk the flour, granulated sugar, baking soda, and salt together in a large bowl. Cut in the butter using a pastry cutter, a fork, or your fingers. Mixture is very heavy on the flour, but do your best to cut in the butter until the butter is pea-sized crumbs. Stir in the raisins. Pour in the buttermilk/egg mixture. Gently fold the dough together until dough it is too stiff to stir. Pour crumbly dough onto a lightly floured work surface. With floured hands, work the dough into a ball as best you can, then knead for about 30 seconds or until all the flour is moistened. If the dough is too sticky, add a little more flour.

3. Transfer the dough to the prepared skillet/pan. Using a very sharp knife or bread lame, score the dough with a slash or X about 1/2 inch deep. ("Score" = shallow cut.)
4. Bake until the bread is golden brown and center appears cooked through, about 45-55 minutes. Loosely tent the bread with aluminum foil if you notice heavy browning on top. For a more accurate test, the bread is done when an instant-read thermometer reads the center of the loaf as 195°F (90°C).
5. Remove from the oven and allow bread to cool for 10 minutes, and then transfer to a wire rack. Serve warm, at room temperature, or toasted with desired toppings/spreads.
6. Cover and store leftover bread at room temperature for up to 2 days or in the refrigerator for up to 1 week. We usually wrap it tightly in aluminum foil for storing.

Notes

1. **Freezing Instructions:** Baked and cooled bread freezes well up to 3 months. Freeze the whole loaf or individual slices. Thaw in the refrigerator or at room temperature, then reheat as desired.
2. **Special Tools** (affiliate links): Cast Iron Skillet, 9-inch Round Cake Pan, 9-inch Pie Dish, Dutch Oven, or Baking Sheet with Silicone Baking Mat or Parchment Paper | Glass Mixing Bowl | Whisk | Pastry Cutter | Bread Lame | Instant-Read Thermometer
3. **Baking Pan:** There are options for the baking pan (see Special Tools Note above). You can use a lined large baking sheet (with or without a rim), a seasoned 10-12 inch cast iron skillet, or a greased or lined 9-10 inch cake pan or pie dish. I don't recommend a loaf pan because the loaf may not bake evenly inside. This dough is best as a flatter loaf.
4. **Buttermilk:** Using cold buttermilk is best. Buttermilk is key to the bread's flavor, texture, and rise. The bread will not rise without it. If you don't have any buttermilk on hand, you can make a homemade buttermilk substitute. Whole milk or 2% milk is best, though lower fat or nondairy milks work in a pinch. Add 1 Tablespoon of lemon juice or white vinegar to a liquid measuring cup. Add enough cold milk to make 1 and 3/4 cups. Whisk together, then let sit for 5 minutes before using in the recipe.
5. **Egg:** 1 egg adds richness and density. Feel free to skip it to make a slightly lighter loaf. No other changes necessary, simply leave out the egg.
6. **Cold Butter:** The colder the butter, the less sticky the dough will be. Make sure it's very cold, even frozen cubed butter is great.
7. **Smaller Loaves:** You can divide this dough up to make smaller loaves. The bake time will be shorter, depending how large the loaves are. An instant read thermometer will be especially helpful. Bake the loaves until an instant-read thermometer reads the center of the loaf as 195°F (90°C).