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Beer is one of four ingredients for quick, tasty bread

It's 10 o'clock in the morning and I am standing in the 10-items-or-less line at the grocery store. I have a deli bag full of sliced turkey and 24-ounce can of beer. A voice inside my head is asking, "Do you think anyone is wondering if this is your new diet?" Another voice chimes in, "Maybe people think you like a beer before lunch." I try to cover up part of the can with the cellophane wrap from the turkey. I pay in cash, stuff my two items in a bag and hurry from the store. The voice says, "Maybe no one saw you."

It's not like I was doing anything illegal, but it felt funny since I'm not a beer drinker. The truth is, I was getting ready to bake bread that called for beer.

The tale begins in Park City, Utah, where we had made arrangements for a weekend of skiing and relaxing. The historic downtown is a fun stroll for window shopping and browsing, but after a rigorous day on the slopes, it's also the place to find a restaurant where someone else makes dinner for you. When we stepped into The Eating Establishment, a fire was blazing, welcoming us to sit down and rest our weary legs. While waiting for our orders to arrive, warm bread with comforting yeasty dough and a worthy crust was placed under our appreciative noses. The slices were consumed with great relish and disappeared rather quickly. This was the restaurant's Famous Beer Bread.

The Eating Establishment's bread recipe is stunningly brief with a mere four ingredients - flour, beer, sugar and butter - and it is a snap to make. You mix the flour and sugar; add the beer and stir; and pour it into a pan. The recipe begins with 12 cups of flour, a quantity I thought exceeded the immediate needs of my small family. I don't remember ever cooking with 12 cups of anything. Therefore, I decided to cut the recipe to a third of its original size, and then the experimenting began.

My first attempt, made with 4 cups of flour and a 24-ounce can of beer, was successful and yet not up to the memories my family had of eating the bread in Park City. Although the crust shone professionally with its brush of butter on top, the taste was not identical to the original. Was it my choice of beer? Clearly, the type of beer affects the final taste and texture of the end product. My first can is known as the champagne of beer, but I would not compare it to a vibrant micro brew. Still, the bread was moist, nicely chewy and perfect to toast.

Now the voice in my head is wondering when I am going to buy more beer. Don't be surprised if you see me in line with a pale ale or a high-class brew. Eventually, I will find just the right one to make a perfect loaf.

Famous Beer Bread can be on your table in less than an hour after you have the idea - and that includes the 45 minutes it takes to bake. You can sidestep the traditional bread regime of kneading, rising and waiting and go straight to enjoying. Bon appetit!

Famous Beer Bread

12 cups (or 4) Gold Medal self-rising flour

1 cup (or 1/3) granulated sugar

72 ounces (or 24) beer

1/2 cup (or 1/6) melted butter

Combine dry ingredients. Add beer to the consistency of a thick batter. Spray four bread pans (10x5x3) with non-stick pan coating. Fill bread pans three-quarters full. Bake in preheated oven at 350 degrees for approximately 45 minutes. Test doneness with a toothpick. Remove from pans, brush lightly with butter. Let cool and wrap.

Hint: I suppose I will need to switch the white flour with whole wheat. That will be my next experiment.

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