

The Low Down on Loaf Pans: What Size & Kind?

<http://kitchenencounters.typepad.com/blog/2013/08/-the-lowdown-on-loaf-pans-what-kind-size-.html>



You've decided to bake a loaf of bread just like Grandma used to make. Good for you!

Nothing is quite as ethereal as the aroma of freshly-baked bread. Her recipe says to put the dough in a loaf pan and you don't have one. You drive to the nearest cooking store to find out you must choose between several manufacturers and price ranges, different materials ranging from clear glass and ceramic to shiny, gray or black metal -- each kind in a variety of sizes too. When I was a novice cook (too many years ago to

mention), decisions like this caused me to lose sleep. Today, I'm going to take the angst out of purchasing a loaf pan for you!

#1: Size matters! Always use the recommended size loaf pan!

BREADS 223

PEANUT BUTTER BACON BREAD (1 loaf)

Nice for morning entertaining.

- 1 cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon melted shortening
- 1 cup milk
- 1 egg, well beaten
- 1 cup peanut butter
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 2 cups flour
- 3 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 cup chopped unsalted peanuts
- 1 cup bacon chips, crisp

Mix sugar, shortening and milk with beaten egg. Add peanut butter. Mix in salt, flour, and baking powder. Add nuts and bacon chips and let stand in greased, floured pan for 20 minutes. Bake at 350° for 1 hour or until done.

"Back in the day", Grandma (and most home-cook bread-bakers) used one "standard" size of loaf pan: it was approximately 9" x 5" x 2 1/2".

That is why heirloom recipes and vintage cookbooks often seem murky or vague on this point.

I baked this luscious recipe for Peanut Butter Bacon Bread from Helen Corbitt's Cookbook a few days ago, and the lack of a specific loaf-pan size irritated me enough to write this blog post!

Nowadays, well-written cookbooks and blogs are specific about pan size because we know the correct pan size is one of the reasons a recipe can either succeed or fail. If you didn't know that, you do now.

Baking is a precise sport. Be sensible. If you wouldn't change the recommended time and temperature guidelines for a recipe, why throw in a substitute for the recommended pan. That being said, pan sizes vary slightly from manufacturer to manufacturer (up to 1/4") and those slight variations won't affect almost any recipe. Focus on getting the proper measurement of your loaf pan and make note of it's volume too:

Baking pans are measured across the top and volume is obtained by filling them with water!

Use this helpful chart as a guideline for the most common loaf pan sizes & volume:

- 5 3/4" x 3 1/4" x 2" (mini) = 2 cups
- 7 3/8" x 3 5/8" x 2" = 3 cups
- 8" x 4" x 2 1/2" = 4 cups

- 8 1/2" x 4 1/2" x 2 1/2" = 6 cups
- 9 1/4" x 5 1/4" x 2 1/2" = 8 cups

Words of wisdom: If you must substitute a loaf pan close in size, choose one slightly bigger rather than slightly smaller. Too small of pan can cause the dough to rise up & burst over the sides.

For example: If you are using a loaf pan with a 4-cup total capacity, you can't fill it to the very top with dough or quick-bread batter. You must leave a headspace of 1/2"-3/4" at the top to allow for rising and/or expansion as the loaf bakes. Well-written recipes (which most are) have already made accommodations for this, so always use the size pan they recommend.

#2. Material Matters! Know what to expect! Glass/ceramic vs. dark or shiny metal:



Over the years, I've baked my share of bread. Some flat, some round and some classic loaves. Some are quick and easy, some are time consuming and difficult.

Baking bread is an art form, and, over the years I've acquired 'a few' loaf pans. Over 35 years of hands-on bread baking experience has taught me what to expect from clear glass and ceramic to dark and shiny aluminum and metal - and they all have a place in my kitchen!

They all conduct heat differently - use it to your advantage!



Oven-proof glass & ceramic: Glass transfers heat quicker than shiny metal (which deflects it), which shortens baking time, which causes bread to be undercooked in the center and overcooked outside. This doesn't mean glass doesn't work. If you love light-colored, slightly-softer sandwich-type bread, glass is great. Just lower the oven temperature by 25 degrees. This gives the bread enough time to cook through to the center without burning it on the outside.

Tip: Want to bake in glass, and get a dark, crispy crust similar to that of bread baked in an aluminum pan? Place the the glass pan on a pizza stone. It will deflect and control the heat!



Dark metals/shiny metals: Dull or dark-colored metals absorb more radiant heat than bright or shiny ones, which reflect it away.

Shiny pans tend to remain 15-20 degrees cooler in a 350 degree oven, which means you need to either increase the heat of the oven and/or extend the cooking time.

Tip: I don't have any real axes to grind with shiny pans, and I don't adjust my oven temperature when I use them, but, I always keep them scoured and shiny. The dough on any darkened spots or blotches may burn before the dough on the shiny portions is properly baked!



Dull or dark metal loaf pans are the best pans ever invented and sturdy, good-weight, medium-colored, non-stick aluminum pans can't be beat. Aluminum is a fantastic conductor of heat and everything I bake in them emerges beautiful and perfectly baked. When I bake in these pans, like glass, I usually lower the oven temperature 25 degrees!

Tip: One advantage to any color of metal pan is metal expands when it gets hot. This makes for easy removal of loaves of any size from a properly

prepped (greased and floured) pan!

One last item: Allow me to answer this before someone asks it. What do I think of flimsy, disposable aluminum loaf pans for baking bread? Not one thing past this mention. They tend to burn bread on the bottom. Save them for making and taking meatloaf to picnics or tailgates!

In Conclusion:

Three men are sitting on a beach. The first man takes his shirt off, leaving his skin vulnerable to too much sun too fast, and, at the end of the day, a bad burn: This is how bread bakes in a glass pan. The second man wears a white T-shirt all day. His skin is somewhat protected from the sun, and stays somewhat cooler, because his white shirt deflects the heat away from him: This is how bread bakes in a shiny metal pan. The third man wears a dark gray shirt. While his skin is somewhat protected from the sun, he is really hot because his shirt is absorbing the heat: This is how bread bakes in a dark metal pan. Baking bread is like a day at the beach!!!