

History of Irish Soda Bread

Many traditions found in Ireland are the makings of legends; true Irish Soda bread remains an international favourite. This Irish classic quick bread owns a flavour hat make it's consumer travel into the history of old. It surprises some people to learn that this traditional recipe hasn't been around for thousands of years. Bicarbonate of soda was first introduced to Ireland around the 1840s.

As befitting many of the best breads in the world – Irish Soda Bread is a traditional product of a poor country, it was made with only the most basic of ingredients: flour, baking soda (used as a leavening agent instead of yeast), soured milk to moisten and activate the soda, and salt. Before baking, a cross was cut on the top with a knife, to ward off the devil and protect the household. From the earliest times, bread-making was an integral part of daily life in almost every home. Families lived in isolated farmhouses where most kitchens had only open hearths, not ovens, so the breads that developed were baked on griddles or in large three-legged black iron pots over fragrant turf fires. This method resulted in a loaf that was tender and dense, with a slight sour tang and a hard crust. Being quite perishable, it was made every 2-3 days and eaten with the main meal, not as dessert.

Soda bread is shaped in different shapes based on the region of Ireland in which it is being prepared. In the Southern regions it is shaped and baked as a round loaf with a cross marked on top. In the North regions of the country, the soda bread is flattened into a round disc and divided into four equal triangular shapes; each triangle is then cooked on a flat griddle. This method of cooking the soda bread is very quick, ideal for when unexpected guests arrive for a bit of banter. The traditional service of the bread is for a section to be broken off, the piece then split and buttered warm.

Today traditions still carry down. The aroma and taste of traditional soda bread is unique to Ireland, and it's become the established favourite with tourists and locals alike. Now in the 21st century, there is an abundance of readily available, good-quality breads in supermarkets, but still quite a few Irish families still bake their own bread daily from specially treasured recipes passed down through the generations.