TOASTED FENNEL FIG SKILLET BREAD

Fennel seeds and dried figs are exceptionally compatible—the flavors just meld well. Falling somewhat into the biscuit/scone camp, this easy bread is quickly cooked on the stovetop. In pioneer days, breads like this were "baked" in a Dutch oven over a campfire. Gammee made the most of her heavy cast-iron skillet.

INGREDIENTS

    1 teaspoon fennel seeds
    1-1/3 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
    2/3 cup rye flour
    1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
    1/2 teaspoon salt
    1/4 teaspoon baking soda
    2 tablespoons cold butter
    1 cup buttermilk
    1/2 cup snipped dried figs
    Melted butter for brushing inside of skillet

DIRECTIONS

1. In heavy, large 10-inch skillet over medium-low heat, toast fennel seeds 3 minutes or just until fragrant, shaking skillet frequently to prevent burning. Remove seeds from pan. Set skillet aside to cool.

2. In large bowl, combine toasted fennel seeds, all-purpose flour, rye flour, baking powder, salt and baking soda. Cut butter into flour mixture with pastry blender or 2 knives until mixture resembles coarse crumbs. Using fork, stir in buttermilk and figs just until moistened.

3. Turn dough out onto well-floured surface. Knead dough 10 to 12 strokes until nearly smooth. Roll or pat dough into circle about 7 inches in diameter and 3/4-inch thick. Cut into 8 wedges with floured knife.

4. Brush cooled skillet with butter. Heat over medium-low heat 1 to 3 minutes or until drop of water sizzles on it. Carefully place dough wedges in skillet.

5. Cover; cook 20 to 25 minutes or until golden brown and wooden pick inserted into side of a wedge comes out clean (turn wedges several times to brown both sides, brushing skillet with more butter if needed). Adjust heat level if, if needed, to prevent overbrowning. Serve bread warm.

Baker's Note: Dried figs should be sweet smelling and slightly moist. The two varieties most common in the U.S. are the light-colored Calimyrna, Kadota, and the dark purple Mission fig. All are grown in California.