

# ESB Monthly Bake - April

## Valjean's **Stolen** Loaves



This recipe is inspired by one of my favourite novels, *Les Misérables*. One loaf is the English cousin of a loaf that Jean Valjean might have stolen, a cottage loaf and the other, a plaited loaf that represents the many strands of the story in the book.

### Ingredients and Equipment

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1 lb 1 oz (500g) Strong White Bread Flour

7g Easy Bake Yeast

1 1/2 tsp caster sugar

1 1/2 tsp salt

1 oz (25g) butter, softened

300ml warm water

An egg (beaten with a tablespoon of water) to glaze

1 oz (25g) poppy seeds

#### Equipment

Two large mixing bowls

A table knife

A clean tea towel

Kitchen roll

A sharp knife

A large baking tray, lined with greaseproof paper

A wooden spoon

Rolling Pin

A pastry brush

A wire rack

## How to make the bake

1. Start by making the dough. Mix the flour, yeast, sugar and salt in a big mixing bowl. Then using your fingertips, rub in the soft butter until it has disappeared and the mixture looks like fine breadcrumbs. (Top tip - Blast the butter in the microwave for 10 seconds so it is the right consistency and you don't have to wait for it to soften at room temperature!) Next, mix in the warm water with a table knife till it comes together in stringy pieces of dough around the knife.
2. Tip the dough on to a clean, floured surface, pull together as a lump and knead for 10 minutes till it is soft, smooth and springy. You know when you have kneaded enough when you poke a floured finger into the dough and it springs back immediately.
3. Lightly grease another mixing bowl with a dash of oil with a piece of kitchen roll. Put the dough into the bowl and turn it over to coat in oil so it doesn't get a skin while it proves. Cover the bowl with a clean tea towel and leave to rise in a warm place until doubled in size.
4. When the dough has doubled in size, knock it back by gently kneading just 5 times to get the air out. Then, separate the dough into two - to make two loaves. Take one half and divide into two thirds and one thirds. Shape the two sections into balls. Line a large baking tray with greaseproof paper and sit the large ball on the tray. Then put the smaller ball on top and push gently. Flour the handle of wooden spoon and push it down through the loaf till you hit the baking tray.
5. Then take the other half and make into a rectangle with a rolling pin. Cut with a sharp knife into three from the top and plait all the way down to the bottom. Tuck under the bottom and place on the tray next to the other. Cover the tray again with tea towel and leave to prove until doubled in size again (about 30 minutes.) Preheat the oven to 200°C.
6. When the second prove time is up, gently brush each loaf with egg wash to coat it and then sprinkle over poppy seeds in a single layer to cover the outside of the loaf. Remember that the dough is quite delicate as it has risen so try not to knock the air out of it!
7. Put the tray in the centre of the oven and bake for, from 25 to 35 minutes until the top is golden brown and the bottom sounds hollow when you tap it. A good way to check if a loaf is cooked is to pick it up with an oven glove and check if the bottom is brown and if it is, it is perfect!
8. Leave to cool on a wire rack for 30 minutes and enjoy with homemade soup and butter.