



Now that you have acquired your bread by making a purchase at a heretofore yet to be discovered bakery, or by two or more days of hard work (not counting the time spent caring for the starter over the past decade or more), you find yourself with a surfeit of the product. What to do to maintain the exquisite texture and flavor of each carefully crafted loaf over a period of days and possibly weeks?

## STORAGE

Assuming you have several loaves to care for, and that they have been allowed to breathe overnight after coming out of the oven, tightly wrap the spare loaves in plastic wrap (*Glad* or *Saran* will do just fine), and place them in sealable plastic freezer bags from which most of the the air has been pressed out. Put the bread in the freezer. Do not cut the loaves to fit in the freezer bags you have available; use bags in which the loaves will fit.

A word to the wise. (Skip this next paragraph if the aforementioned attribute is not an appropriate descriptor of the reader). Never place a loaf of bread in the refrigerator no matter how it is wrapped; the freezer is the only appropriate storage location for bread. You would never think of storing an opened container of maple syrup in a warm cupboard would you? considering the attendant loss of flavor and spoilage. Well, don't put bread in the refrigerator for the same reasons and more.

## MAINTENANCE FOR DAILY CONSUMPTION

Starting with a fresh loaf, cut it in half. Treat one of the halves as you would a whole loaf under "Storage" above with the proviso that this will be the next half consumed. So keep it in an accessible location in the freezer.

Place the half to be consumed that day on a breadboard with the cut side in contact with the breadboard. Never leave the cut side exposed to

the air except when cutting. You may leave the bread in this upright position for the entire day without any harmful effects to the crumb. The crust may harden slightly.

At the end of the day, place whatever remains of the loaf in a plastic bag and toss it in the freezer with abandon (no plastic wrap required). You may continue this treatment for a week or more with very little noticeable change from the original condition. However, I have very little experience with this technique as a half loaf of bread in our house has a half-life measured in hours, not days.

## CONDIMENTS—REQUISITES AND HINTS

**Butter:** Use only fresh, cultured, unsalted butter on artisan bread. The bread has had salt added during preparation for a number of reasons. *Organic Valley* produces one of the best of this genre using Swiss cultures. You can find it in the organic cooler in your food market.

A note about the storage of butter: treat it like it was artisan bread. Wrap the foil packaging in plastic wrap, place it in a freezer bag and store it in the freezer. When you need some for use, cut only what you will need for a day or two, rewrap and place the remainder back in the freezer. Never (with one exception mentioned below) store butter in the refrigerator; it will spoil quickly and in addition pick up the odors of every item within.

Place the butter for use in a container on the counter next to the bread. Cover the container with an air-tight seal. We use a round glass container (no plastic in contact with the butter, please) with a removable plastic lid. We keep a butter knife next to the container which can be cleaned using warm water after each use. Use this knife for the butter only! Leave the butter on the counter during the day: it will not spoil and you want it soft for easy spreading. Place the butter (in its air-tight container) in the refrigerator for overnight storage.

**Preserves:** Try wild blueberry by *Bonne Maman*. A product of France – there is no better. Toast the bread first, spread with butter, add a half spoonful of preserves.

**Meats:** Butter optional. Smoked salmon – known as *Nova Flakes*: best obtained from a Kosher deli. Or try *Campofrio Clasico Chorizo* sausage sliced very thin.

**Cheeses:** Take your pick of soft artisan cheeses, but for a taste you won't easily forget: a slice of *Kerrygold Vintage Dubliner* melted for 20 seconds in the microwave on the bread. Also try placing a slice of *Mozzarella (BelGioioso)* under the Chorizo and melt in the microwave - instant pizza.

**Final Considerations:**

We find the size of the loaf to be an important factor in its enjoyment. Batards tend to be too wide, and baguettes too narrow. I make something I call a bigguette, which has a width/diameter somewhere between the two. The result is a loaf that fits crosswise in a gallon ziplock plastic bag, or half a loaf in a ziplock quart freezer bag.

Bon appétit!