

Barmbrack *(Bairín brac)*



Tradition

In the 7th Century, Pope Boniface declared 1st November to be 'All Saint's Day', also known as 'All Hallows Day', as a ploy to eradicate paganism and with it the festival formerly known as 'Samhain'. Sure enough, however, the name stuck and the evening before became better known as 'All Hallow's Eve' or Halloween.

The Celts looked to the future at Samhain and could see clues in the year ahead in the simplest of things. The traditional bread served on Halloween is the Barmbrack (or *Bairín brac* as gaeilge). The name for this cake is derived from the old English word 'beorma' (for 'barm') meaning yeasty or fermented, while 'brack' comes from the Irish word 'brac' meaning speckled. Thus, the cake is a yeasty, sweet fruit cake laced with dried fruits and warming spices.

At Halloween, each member of the family would serve themselves a slice of the barmbrack. The brack itself denotes courtship, luck and fortune, whereby a ring, thimble, coin and piece of cloth found within the brack, were viewed as a testament of marriage, wealth and misfortune.

Note: 'Bracks' made with yeast are so called '**barm bracks**' while those made using baking powder and fruit soaked in tea/whiskey are called '**tea bracks**'.

Ingredients

- Traditional Irish barmbrack charms, i.e. *gold ring (marriage), dried pea (no marriage), matchstick (unhappy marriage), coin (fortune), piece of cloth (misfortune), button (bachelorhood) & thimble (spinsterhood)*
- 450g plain flour
- ½ tsp cinnamon
- ½ tsp ground nutmeg
- 7g dried yeast (1 sachet)
- 75g butter
- 75g caster sugar
- 250g L milk
- 1 egg (beaten)
- 150g raisins
- 100g currants
- 50g chopped dried fruit, nuts or candied peel (or mixture thereof)



Method

1. Mix the yeast with 1 tbsp of sugar
2. Warm the milk and add the butter, letting it melt into the milk
3. Add half the warmed milk mixture into the yeast/sugar
4. Add the beaten egg and stir
5. Sift the cinnamon and nutmeg with the flour into a bowl
6. Make a well in the centre and pour in the yeast mixture
7. Cover the bowl and leave in a warm place for 20-30 minutes allowing the yeast to froth up
8. After 30 minutes, add remaining liquid and mix the whole lot into a dough. Turn it out onto a floured board, sprinkle on the sugar, dried fruit (raisins and currants) and peel. At this stage also add in your charms and knead into the dough (7-10 minutes)
9. Next, put the dough into a butter greased bowl, cover with a damp cloth (or clingfilm) and leave in a warm place to prove (double in size) – this develops the structure of the bread!
10. Once the dough has doubled in size, knock it back and knead before shaping into a baking tin (8" round – traditional or 1lb loaf tin)
11. Brush the top with melted butter and allow to sit for 30 minutes to 1 hour until doubled once again in size – this develops the flavour of the bread!
12. While the second proving is taking place, pre-heat the oven to 200°C (400°F/ Gas mark 6)
13. Once risen, bake for 40-45 minutes (or until a skewer comes out clean)
14. For a nice sheen to your brack, mix 1 tbsp sugar into 50ml boiling water and brush over the top of the brack straight from the oven
15. Leave to cool (uncovered) before serving

– Enjoy!

TIP: Lightly toast and spread with creamy Irish butter for a delicious take on the bairín brack!



Óiche Shamhna shona daoibh!

