

## *Suggested Order for Baking Prósfora*

Set out ingredients and utensils, and prepare working space.

Throughout the entire process, never use any ingredients except flour, water, yeast, and salt.

Before an icon (or before the family icon corner), place a lighted candle and/or a censer with burning charcoal and incense.

All who participate in baking the Prósfora should say the following prayer:

*O Lord, this bread which we will bake represents each one of us in this family and in our congregation. We offer ourselves to You, Who are our very Life, in humble obedience and in total commitment to Your will. We place ourselves on the Holy Altar through this bread, to be used by You in any way that You know will be to our spiritual benefit and to the benefit of Your holy Church. Accept our offering, and make us worthy to receive the greater Gift that You will return to us when You consecrate this bread as Your most precious body. Amen.*

Begin preparing the Prósfora, accompanied by readings from the Book of Psalms.

Those making the bread should take turns kneading and reading the Psalms.

The following recipe may be used, and remember:

Do not use any oil, grease, or shortening of any kind!

Do not use any sugar, or any other sweetener!

Only use yeast; do not use any other leavening agent!

After the dough rises once, knead it again. Press the seal down on the loaf for as long as it takes to quietly recite the Lord's Prayer, then remove it carefully. Let the loaf rise a second time.

Maintain a constant attitude of prayer.

After the bread is baked, it should be allowed to cool and placed in an appropriate area of the house until it is time to bring it to the church to be used by the priest in the Preparation of the Gifts before the Divine Liturgy.



## A Prósfora (Altar Bread) Recipe

### Training:

Before starting to bake Prósfora, please get permission from your parish priest.

Next, obtain a religious seal, and seek training.

Your priest can advise you on both those points.

### Ingredients:

1 pkg. dry yeast

2 ½ cups water

2 tsp. salt

6 ¾ to 7 cups flour

### Directions:

Dilute yeast in warm (not hot) water to activate yeast

Add salt, then half of flour and stir

Mix remainder of flour with hand until dough is firm

Knead until dough is smooth

Divide dough and place in 8, 9 or 10 inch pans that have been floured only

Do not grease pans

Keep in mind that dough should be smoothed out to cover the bottom half of the depth of pan.

This recipe makes two loaves of bread.

You will need to double the recipe for four loaves.

Take religious seal and dip in flour, shaking off any excess flour that may accumulate, and press seal firmly in center of dough.

Use a sharp knife or toothpick to prick the dough all around the seal.

Remove seal and let dough rise until it is almost doubled in bulk.

Remember, dough will also rise in oven and too much rising can erase seal.

Bake in 400 degree oven for approximately 30 minutes or until done.

Wrap in clean cloth while cooling so crust will soften.

Place bread in freezer bags.

If the bread is intended for extras, please mark the date on the freezer bag and put it in the freezer in the church kitchen.

*This recipe was taken from*

*A LENTEN COOKBOOK FOR ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS*

## *Suggested Recipe for Baking Prósfora (for two loaves)*

### *Ingredients:*

- 1 packet yeast
- 1-1/2 cups warm water (the amount will vary!)
- 5 Cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 large mixing bowl
- 1 Prósfora seal

### *Procedure:*

1. Dissolve yeast in warm water.
2. Add salt and flour.
3. Throughout the entire process, never use any ingredients except flour, water, yeast, and salt.
4. Knead until smooth. Add more flour or water until texture of dough is moist but not sticky. Place in large bowl, cover, and let rise.
5. When doubled in size, knead again. Then divide dough in half, shape into round loaves and place in round cake pans which have been floured only. (*Do not grease or oil pans!*)
6. Dust top of each loaf lightly with flour and flatten slightly.
7. Dip Prósfora seal in flour and then press firmly on top of each loaf until impression on loaf is clear and distinct. Hold seal down for as long as it takes to quietly recite the Lord's Prayer.
8. If dough is not firm enough to accept seal, re-knead adding more flour.
9. With a toothpick, poke deep holes on top of the loaf, around the seal. This is a vital step to prevent the formation of an air bubble under the crust while baking, which makes the prósfora unusable by the Priest for the Oblation.
10. Cover loaves with towel, and allow to rise again until seal is even with edge of loaf.
11. Bake in preheated oven at 350° for 45 to 60 minutes (the time will vary!).
12. Remove from oven and allow to cool.



## A Greek Prósfora Recipe

Note: This recipe is copied from Vefa Alexiadou's wonderful cookbook, "Greek Pastries and Desserts" (ISBN 960-85018-7-3). I cannot praise this book enough, and recommend it to anyone interested in baking. You will find a load of great recipes, including a hefty section of Orthodox holiday breads.

**Yields 2 Altar Breads**

**Preparation time 40 minutes**

**Baking time 20 minutes**

### Ingredients:

6 cups country or all purpose flour

1 teaspoon salt

2 cups tepid water (100 °F)

*1 recipe, Traditional Sourdough Starter {not reproduced here} or*

1 oz fresh yeast or

2 teaspoons dry yeast

### Procedure:

*If using sourdough starter, reactivate it the night before.*

Otherwise, dissolve the yeast in one half cup of the tepid water.

Add 3-4 tablespoons flour and mix well.

Let it stand for about 10 minutes or until doubled in bulk.

Meanwhile sift the flour with the salt into a kneading basin and make a well in the center.

Pour in the sour-dough starter or the yeast mixture and the remaining tepid water.

Gradually incorporate flour from the sides of the well into the water until all the flour is moist, and knead until a smooth and elastic dough is formed.

Cover the dough with plastic wrap, and let it rise in a warm place until doubled in bulk, about 2 hours.

Knead the dough again for about 5 minutes and divide into 4 equal parts.

Shape each part into a ball.

Slightly flatten the balls into rounds, pressing with your palms, and flour them generously.

Put the two rounds, one on top of the other, in a well-floured baking pan.

Dip the religious seal in flour, shake off the excess and press it firmly onto the floured surface.

Let the seal remain on dough for about 5 minutes and carefully remove it.

Place the other two rounds, the same way, onto a separate pan.

Cover and leave in a warm place to rise until doubled in bulk.

Just before baking, prick inside and outside corners of cross with a wooden skewer to attain a flat-top appearance of the breads.

Bake in a 400 °F oven for 15-20 minutes, taking care not to burn them.

As soon as they are removed from the oven, brush them with a little water, using a pastry brush.

Cover the altar breads with a cotton towel and leave them to cool on a rack.

## Another Prósfora Recipe and Baking Instructions

### 1 Things you will need

### 2 Ingredients

### 3 Kneading

### 4 Shaping the cakes

### 5 Baking

Before you start, please ask your parish priest for blessing to bake prósfora for your community.

He and/or experienced bakers in your parish may also advise you on any variations/customs that apply to your locale and guide your first steps.

### 1 Things you will need

The mixing bowl, cloth towels and pans that I use for prósfora are dedicated to this purpose and not used in any other setting.

- a. Cooking pans: I use Wilton round 9 in pans. They're cheap and distribute heat very well. I was less successful using more expensive aluminum pans.
- b. Single use toothpicks.
- c. Orthodox Bread Seal.
- d. Cotton towels.

### 2 Ingredients

This makes about 4 prósfora loaves. There should be no other ingredients! No oil for sure.

- 4 cups wheat flour
- 2.5 cups water
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 1 level teaspoon dry yeast

What type of flour to use? It certainly should be wheat-based. Should it be whole, pastry, or unbleached white? My thoughts: first, this is not a baking contest. Way back when, before there were many kinds of flour, people would mill the grains and sift the flour. I'd say, use the flour that people consider acceptable for baking in the area where you live.

Notes:

- You may need to adjust the quantities of water/yeast based on the type of flour used.
- I find that unbleached white flour is the easiest to work with. I use 5 Roses; King Arthur or Bob's Red Mill are good though more expensive. Ceresota has never worked for me, as have not any of the brands bought at Costco or Sam's.
- Yeast: Costco sells it in packages of 2x2lb for about \$5, else you can pay the same amount for 4oz jars at grocery stores or get it in tiny packet sizes.
- Water should be lukewarm - cold water will impede rising, hot water will kill the yeast.
- Do the work in a warm place, away from air currents.

### **3 Kneading**

Place the flour in a mixing bowl. Shape a dip in the middle, large enough to contain about 1 cup of water. Pour yeast and 1 cup water. Sprinkle the salt in the corners. Cover bowl with a towel and let sit for 5-10 minutes.

Start incorporating flour into the water/yeast combination. Pour more water as you go. Make a ball of dough to which you keep adding more water and more flour. It probably takes 15-20 minutes to work this amount of flour into dough. The dough should not feel dry to the fingers, and yet not that wet to be overly sticky. Cover the bowl with towels, and let dough rise for 1 hour.

1 hour later, the dough must have risen some. Knead it again for 10-15 minutes, then cover and let rise for another 1 hour.

### **4 Shaping the cakes**

Lightly sprinkle the baking pan with flour. Grab a chunk of dough (about your closed fist size) and, using the minimum amount of handling, shape it into a flat round cake (pat-a-cake, pat-a-cake...) The fewer moves you do the better; this is not the time to knead and play with the dough. Generously douse the cake with flour on both sides, then shake off the excess flour and place on the baking pan. Repeat the process with a 2nd cake and place it on top of the first.

Dip the seal in flour, knock it to shake off the flour, and then stamp it on top of the cake with all your strength. Lift it carefully so you do not alter the seal imprint on the dough. This may take some practice to get right.

Cover baking pans with towels and let rise again for ~30 minutes in a warm place.

### **5 Baking**

Using a toothpick, poke holes in the dough, all around the seal, going all the way down to the pan. This will help the prósfora bread rise evenly.

Preheat the oven at 375 F and bake for ~25 minutes. Once out, wrap prósfora in a cotton towel until it cools.