Duona

One of the oldest and most fundamental Lithuanian food products was and is rye bread. Rye bread is eaten every day for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Bread plays an important role in family holiday rituals and agrarian ceremonies. Lithuanians link many beliefs and magic with bread. One of them is the protective characteristic of bread, protection from fire and help in putting out fires. For protection a piece of bread is placed in the foundation when building a new house.

Bread is shown great respect, is called holy and is referred to in the feminine gender. If a piece of bread falls accidentally to the ground, it is picked up with reverence, kissed and eaten. This is done so that the home would never be without bread.

Two kinds of bread are traditional, plain fermented and scalded. Plain fermented bread has been baked from earliest times, while scalded bread has only been baked since the start of the 20th century. Plain bread ferments overnight but needs to be kneaded for a long time, while scalded bread fermentation takes almost 3 days.

Bread baking has been the honorable duty of the mistress of the house. This duty was passed on to the eldest daughter with special ceremonies. Mother would collect all bread baking equipment and hand it over to the grown up daughter, together with a kiss. After the daughter baked her first loaf, mother gathered the entire family and invited the nearest neighbor to taste the daughter’s first bread. The first slice went to father, who then kissed his daughter and turned her and the bench she sat on towards the door. This meant that the daughter was prepared to be a homemaker, was ready
for marriage.

Bread baking day was a very special day. Peace and quiet reigned in the home. If a visitor arrived on bread baking day, he had to remain until the bread was done. Nothing was loaned out on bread baking day, with the belief that the borrower would take away the bread's good taste. Every homemaker is proud of the taste of her bread and proudly states that one's own bread is tastier than somebody else's cake. Even though very few homemakers bake bread at home now, they value the traditional belief that bread is more valuable than gold.

**BLACK RYE BREAD**

*Juoda ruginė duona*

3 k (6 lbs) coarsely ground rye flour

1 l (1 quart) water

starter, salt

**STARTER**

1/2 k (1 lb) rye flour

50 g (2 oz) fresh yeast

1 l (1 quart) warm water

Starter is used to leaven black rye bread. Starter is usually a leftover of dough from the last bread baking. Just before baking, the saved piece of dough is dissolved in warm water and is added to the newly mixed dough. Should there be no starter a new starter is prepared before mixing new dough. Mix all starter ingredients, keep in a warm spot to ensure maximum fermentation. This starter should be ready in 24 hours. Starter gives bread an agreeable, pleasant sour taste. Every starter has its own particular taste. Some
homemakers add sour milk in place of water.

To make dough, heat water to 100-110°F/40-45°C, pour half of the flour, starter and mix well. Sprinkle dough with flour and set in a warm spot to ferment. During fermentation the volume of dough will almost triple. Fermentation is complete after about 14 hours. Then beat dough, add remaining flour, salt and knead well. Smooth top of dough, dampen with wet hands, cover and set in warm spot to rise for about 3 hours.

Prepare baking pans by lining them with maple or cabbage leaves or dust with flour.

Form oblong loaves, smooth tops with damp hands. Bake in preheated oven at 400°F/200°C, for about 2-3 hours. Bread is done when it gives off a solid sound. Dampen tops of loaves with cold water, cover loaves with a light linen cloth and let cool at room temperature. Do not place freshly baked loaves in a cold place for that will cause the crust to separate.

Black rye bread remains fresh for up to 2 weeks when refrigerated.

**SCALDED RYE BREAD**

*Plikyta ruginė duona*

2 k (4 lbs) rye flour

1 1/2 l (6 cups) water, scalding hot

1/2 cup caraway seed, salt

starter

dried cabbage or maple leaves to line baking pans

Take one third of the flour, scald with boiling water, mix well. Cover and let rest in warm spot. Dissolve starter in warm water and add to dough and mix well. Cover and let rest in warm spot about 24 hours. Fermenting dough
needs to be beaten 4 or 5 times so that more air is incorporated into the dough. Extra air is needed for yeast activity.

When dough has reached full fermentation, add remaining flour, caraway seed, salt and knead until dough does not stick to hands. Cover and let rise for about 6 hours. Scalded bread needs longer rising.

Wet hands and form 2 small loaves, arrange leaves in baking pans or sprinkle pans with flour, place loaves in pans and bake in preheated oven at 400F/180C, for about 2 hours.

Remove loaves from oven, dampen tops, cover with linen cloth and set to cool.

Scalded bread has a sweet-sour taste and remains fresh for a long time.

**BREAD WITH YEAST**

*Duona su mielėmis*

12 cups rye flour
3 tablespoons sugar
50 g (2 oz) fresh yeast
1 l (1 quart) whey, butter milk or water
pinch of salt
1/2 cup beer or water
1/2 cup caraway seed

Heat whey (butter milk or water) to 95F/30-35C, add yeast blended with sugar and let proof for 15 minutes. Add half of the flour, mix well, cover and let rise for 1 hour. Then add remaining flour, caraway seed, salt and knead until dough is not sticky. Cover dough, set in
warm spot and let rise for about an hour. Wet hands and form 2 oblong loaves, place in leaf lined baking pans and set in warm spot for another rising. Before baking, paint tops with beer or water. Bake in preheated oven at 375F/190C, for about 2 hours. When bread is done paint tops again with water and cover with linen cloth until cooled. This will make a soft crust.

**BLACK RYE BREAD WITH POTATOES**

*Juoda ruginė duona su bulvėmis*

10 k (20 lbs) rye flour

4 l (4 quarts) water

2 k (4 lbs) potatoes, cooked in their skins

100 g (3 oz) salt

Peel and rice potatoes. Mix one third of the flour with starter, riced potatoes and mix well with water heated to 95F/35C. Sprinkle top of dough with flour and place in warm spot to ferment. Add remaining flour and proceed with same steps as for ordinary bread.

**BARLEY ROLLS**

*Miežinis ragaišis*

1 k (2 lbs) coarsely milled barley flour

3 cups water (or milk or whey)

10 g (2 teaspoons) yeast

10 g (2 teaspoons) salt

50 g (2 oz) sugar

Dissolve yeast in sweetened, warm liquid, add one third
of the flour and mix well. Sprinkle with flour and set at room temperature overnight. Next morning beat mixture, add remaining flour, salt and knead well. Rest dough for another rising. Make form on bran sprinkled surface, let rise. Bake in preheated oven at 350F/180C, until rolls are golden brown. Remove rolls from oven and rub with fat.

These rolls replace regular bread on feast days.

Some homemakers add just 2 or 3 cooked potatoes and use milk to make a soft dough. These rolls are tastiest when eaten fresh out of the oven.

**WHEAT BREAD**

*Kvietinis ragaišis*

1 k (2 lbs) coarsely milled wheat flour

3 cups water or milk

50 g (2 oz) sugar

20 g (4 teaspoons) fresh yeast

2 teaspoons salt

Mix yeast with sugar and dissolve in warm liquid. Add one third of flour, mix well and set in warm spot to rise. Beat yeast dough, add salt and remaining flour and knead well. Brush top of dough with fat to keep it from drying out as it rises. Form large, round rolls on a bran sprinkled surface. Let rise and paint with egg wash before placing in preheated oven, bake at 350F/180C, until rolls are nicely browned.