



Fond du Lac Public Library

## Breads of the World: England

Presented 7/18/2017 by Catherine Block

Although saffron threads may seem tiny, a little bit goes a long way. Use sparingly for flavor that's delicate and not overpowering. This quick-bread recipe is from Susan Pellowe's *Saffron & Currants: A Cornish Heritage Cookbook*.

### Saffron Tea Bread

*Makes 8 servings*

#### Ingredients:

¼ teaspoon saffron threads  
¼ cup hot water, plus ½ cup water (divided)  
2 cups flour  
2 teaspoons baking powder  
1 teaspoon salt  
¼ teaspoon baking soda  
½ teaspoon lemon zest  
½ cup solid vegetable shortening  
¾ cup sugar  
2 eggs  
2 teaspoons lemon juice  
½ cup dried currants

#### Directions:

1. Add saffron to ¼ cup hot water and allow to steep for 30 minutes.
2. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
3. In a medium-size bowl, stir together flour, baking powder and salt. Set aside.
4. In a large bowl, blend baking soda and lemon zest with shortening. Beat in sugar and the eggs, one at a time. Combine lemon juice with remaining ½ cup water and add the saffron-infused water.
5. Mix liquid into shortening batter alternately with the flour (ending with flour). Beat with an electric mixer 30 seconds after everything has been combined and stir in the currants.
6. Grease a 9-by-5-inch loaf pan with vegetable oil spray and add batter. Bake in preheated oven 60 minutes or until top is golden brown and a toothpick inserted into center comes out clean.
7. Cool in pan 10 minutes before carefully removing. Finish cooling on a wire rack.

## Did you know? Facts about saffron

1. Saffron threads are the dried stigmas of the *Crocus sativus* flower.
2. Human cultivation and use of saffron reaches back more than 3,500 years and spans many cultures, continents and civilizations. Saffron has remained among the world's most costly substances throughout history. With its bitter taste, hay-like fragrance and slight metallic notes, saffron has been used as a seasoning, fragrance, dye and medicine.
3. It takes 4,500 flowers to make just one ounce of saffron because there are only three strands of saffron in each flower. Every saffron thread has to be hand-picked.
4. Unlike our Midwestern crocus, *Crocus sativus* flowers in mid-October. After blossoming at dawn, flowers quickly wilt as the day passes, so harvesting is a speedy affair.
5. Saffron can cost up to \$315 per ounce (for the very best kind): roughly \$5,000 a pound. Luckily, you only need a few strands to flavor an entire meal. Actually, if you use too many strands you risk getting a bitter flavor.
6. Almost all saffron today grows in a belt bounded by the Mediterranean in the west and mountainous Kashmir in the east. All other continents except Antarctica produce smaller amounts. Iran is the world's leading producer.
7. Saffron's strength is in its color. Its principal chemical compound, crocin, is measured in a lab and ranges from 110 to 250-plus; the higher the number the better. Crocin is responsible for the aroma, flavor and color. Generally, a pure-red saffron is going to measure highest on the scale.
8. Saffron has a long shelf life: over two years when stored in a cool, dark place.
9. Watch out for fakery. Not even the highest price will guarantee the best quality. Here are three red flags that indicate fakery through dyeing: long red threads, very uniform red color and streaks of yellow across the thread, which happens when one thread is covered by another causing an uneven dyeing process.

