



A few years ago my friend Elspeth made me try Pain aux Noix from the monastery in Le Barroux. I didn't understand—walnuts are nasty, why have bread with them? At least that was my experience in Canada. She insisted that I've never had a proper, fresh walnut, and if I did, I'd change my mind. She was right! Walnuts are amazing, meaty, sweet, gorgeous. Mostly we get rancid walnuts in Canada, so if you find them bitter, throw them out. They are not as they should be.

So this is my attempt at recreating the best walnut bread I've ever had. Not quite the same as in France, but thanks to another friend Didi, I was able to use the freshest of walnuts. She brought me a huge bag, just in season from the Savoie, right before I left France to bring back with me. I am so grateful...

Pain aux Noix

Ingredients

For a 660 g loaf

350 g flour (you can use unbleached all-purpose, or a combination of all-purpose and whole wheat. I used 300g all-purpose & 50g whole)
210 ml water
70 g chopped walnuts
1 tbsp walnut oil
2 1/4 tsp dry yeast
1 tsp lemon juice
1 tsp salt

Preparation:

Preheat oven to 400F (200C).

Combine a pinch of sugar and 60ml (1/4 cup) of the water in a small bowl. Sprinkle with the yeast. Set aside in a draught-free place for a few minutes until foaming.

Combine the flour, salt, water, yeast, oil, and lemon juice in the bowl of a mixer with a dough hook attachment. Slowly blend (If necessary, add a little extra water if the dough is too dry, or flour if it's too sticky). Once combined knead on medium speed for 6 minutes or until smooth.

Add the walnuts and knead until incorporated (but not crushed).

Turn the dough onto a lightly floured surface and knead a few times by hand until smooth and elastic. Brush a large bowl with oil to grease. Place the dough in the bowl and turn to lightly coat in the oil. Cover the bowl with damp towel and set aside in a warm, draught-free place for 1-2 hours or until the dough has doubled in size.

Punch down the centre of the dough with your fist. Shape dough into a ball or a loaf. Place on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Cover loosely with a tea towel. Set aside for 1 hour or until the loaf rises slightly.

Cut 3 slashes diagonally on the top. Bake for 30-35 minutes or until the loaf is golden and sounds hollow when tapped on the base. Transfer to a wire rack to cool slightly.

