Innovative Iowans: Otto Rohwedder

Activity Overview: You could say this Innovative Iowan activity is the best thing since sliced bread. To celebrate National Bread Month, this month's Innovative Iowan features Otto Rohwedder, the inventor of sliced bread. After learning about Rohwedder's bread-slicing invention, young historians can head into the kitchen to bake their own loaves of bread. Automatic slicing machines are not required though.

Connection to Iowa History

Otto Rohwedder was born in Dubuque, Iowa in 1880. After graduating from the Davenport public school system and receiving a degree in optics from the Illinois College of Optometry, he eventually decided to become a jeweler. Following the sale of his three jewelery stores, Rohwedder put the money towards developing his new bread-slicing invention. He successfully designed his new machine in 1927, and the first sliced loaf of bread was sold in 1928. In 1933, he sold his patent rights to Micro-West Company of Bettendorf, Iowa. Rohwedder passed away in 1960, and the original bread-slicing machine is currently in the Smithsonian Institute.



Instructions (Video Instructions Available)

1. **Prep.** Head into the kitchen and gather all the needed ingredients and materials required for this activity.
2. **Combine.** In the open Zip Lock bag, scoop 1 cup flour, the packet of rapid rise yeast and warm water. Seal the Zip Lock bag closed after removing all of the air from the bag.
3. **Mix.** Using the palms of your hands, mix the ingredients inside the closed bag by pressing down on the outside of the bag in a kneading fashion. Be sure to move the bag around to ensure everything is incorporated.
4. **Rest.** After the ingredients are mixed, set the bag aside and let the mixture rest for 10-15 minutes.
5. **Add.** After the mixture has rested, reopen the Zip Lock bag to add one more cup of flour. Also, add the salt and olive oil. Remove the air, reseal the bag and mix to combine again.
6. **More Flour.** After everything is incorporated, reopen the bag again to add the last cup of flour to the dough. Then remove the air, reseal the bag, and mix again until combined.
7. **Knead.** Remove the dough from the bag and knead the dough for 10 minutes on a flat surface. Use the palms of your hands to push and stretch the dough. To prevent sticking, knead the dough on floured parchment paper.

Instructions continued on next page

Materials

- Zip Lock Bag
- Measuring Cups and Spoons
- Large Bowl
- Bread Pan
- 3 Cups Flour
- 3 Tbsp Sugar
- 1.25 oz Packet Rapid Rise Yeast
- 1 1/2 tsp Salt
- 1 Cup Warm Water
- 3 Tbsp Olive Oil

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Instructions continued

8 **Rest.** After the dough is kneaded, place the dough in a greased bowl. Cover the bowl with a warm damp towel and let the dough rise for 30 minutes. During this time, preheat the oven to 375 degrees.

9 **Bake.** Place the risen dough into a greased bread pan. Bake for 25-35 minutes until golden brown and fully baked.

10 **Enjoy.** Remove the bread from the oven and let it cool before enjoying.

11 **Share!** After you make your bread, share your baked goods with the State Historical Museum of Iowa. Email a photo to museum.education@iowa.gov. We want to share your creation with others!

12 **Questions to Spark Learning**

- Do you think food is an important part of people's culture? Why or why not?
- How do you think the invention of the bread-slicing machine changed the food industry?
- Rohwedder kept his invention a secret until he received patents. A patent is a right from the government that grants the inventor ownership of their invention. Why do you think he did this?

Additional Resources

If your young historian would like to learn more about this topic, explore these additional resources below.

- Bread-slicing Machine - National Museum of American History
- *Who Invented Sliced Bread?* - History
- *Sliced Bread: The History of How it Became the 'Best Thing'* - Time Magazine