A Harvest Loaf — French Fougasse bread

This makes 2 loaves which freeze really well if you don't need them both at once.

The dough is very soft and sticky rather like a *focaccia*, so it is easier to use a mixer with a dough hook or a bread machine on 'dough mode' rather than your hands to knead.

350 ml tepid water

2 tbs olive oil

500g strong white bread flour

1 tsp salt

½ tbs sugar

7g sachet of easy bake yeast

2 tbs mixed chopped herbs — choose from a mix of rosemary, thyme, winter savory and sage

Coarse black pepper and dried oregano flakes to top the loaves

If you are using a bread machine on the dough setting add the first 6 ingredients to the pan in the order suggested in your instruction booklet. Reserve a tablespoon of flour and stir into the chopped herbs, these can go into the dispenser which adds nuts, fruit etc part way through the cycle.

To use a mixer like a Kenwood Chef or similar, put the flour, salt, sugar and yeast into the bowl and add the water and oil. Mix with the dough hook slowly until the dough has formed and then mix on medium for 8 – 10 minutes, adding the herbs about a minute before the end. The dough should be shiny and elastic.

You can, of course, knead by hand but this is a very sticky dough and you will need to scrape back your hands and the worktop regularly. To bake:

- Preheat your oven to 200°C / Gas mark 7
- When your dough is prepared — by whichever method — turn it onto a floured worktop and divide in two.
- Line two large baking sheets with baking paper and put half of the dough onto each sheet.
- Gently press each dough ball flat with the heel of your hands into an oval or leaf shape.
- Using a sharp knife or a small pizza cutter, make a slit down the centre of each dough shape stopping before you reach the edge of the dough.
- Make 3 – 4 cuts at a diagonal on either side of this central cut like veins of a leaf, again don't cut right to the edge.
- Open up the cuts a little with your finger and then brush the dough generously with olive oil and sprinkle with the oregano and black pepper.
- Leave these to rise in a warm place for 30 – 45 minutes or until they are doubled in size.
- Then bake for 20 – 25 minutes until the base sounds hollow when tapped.

Great served warm from the oven with soup or salad or as an accompaniment to most meals.