

In our family, it would not be Thanksgiving, nor would it be Christmas, without Monkey Bread. What, you may ask, is monkey bread? Well, I guarantee, the real thing is NOT covered with cinnamon and brown sugar. Bring such an abomination to our house and you'll be greeted with "You ain't from around here, are ya, Bub?" ...or louder and worse.

## The Recipe

### Monkey Bread

(old recipe from Albany, Texas)  
(Three rings will serve 10 – 12 people)  
(Takes about 7 hours)

- 1 pkg. fresh yeast
- ½ cup lukewarm water

Dissolve yeast in the lukewarm water (1/2 hr.) Do this early. If it fails to start bubbling, add a little sugar and flour, and wait an hour.

- 2/3 cup sugar
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 cup mashed potatoes (real, not instant)

Mix sugar, salt and mashed potatoes in a very large earthenware bowl.

- 1 cup milk
- 3 cups (of 6 total) sifted unbleached bread flour [*Optional: ½ whole wheat flour*]

Add the milk, mix, then add half the flour.

- 2 eggs

Beat eggs in a small bowl and add to the mixture.

- 3 additional cups (6 total) sifted unbleached bread flour
- yeast mixture (from above)

Sift remaining flour in and mix well. Add the yeast mixture. Mix well.

- 2/3 cup margarine (1½ sticks)
- 2/3 cup butter (not margarine) (1½ sticks)

Melt butter and margarine over low heat. Cool to lukewarm. Add to the mixture. Mix well.

*[This cures the problem of the dough not rising. This avoids coating the yeast with oil. Don't add the butter until everything else has been added and mixed first.]*

Knead 20-30 times to develop the gluten. If too dry, add flour while kneading. If too dry, add lukewarm water. Get the dough to a consistency that it is moist enough to clean the sides of the bowl and make a nice ball.

Let dough rise about 2 hours in a warm place covered by a tea towel (but not more than about 100° F). Punch it back down. If made ahead of time, place in the refrigerator overnight (covered by waxed paper) and continue the process the next day. If made the day you'll need it, punch it back down.

- 1 stick butter (not margarine)
- 1 tsp salt

Melt another half-stick or so of butter, plus the salt. Use the other half-stick to grease the inside of at least

three ring pans. (You may use cake pans if you place an inverted glass in the center.) Pull balls of the kneaded-down dough off and dip them into the melted butter. Place in the rings no more than two layers deep. Cover each ring with a towel and allow to rise in a warm place (no more than 100° F). When bread has risen back up to the top edges of the pans, place into a pre-heated 350° oven for 45 minutes (top rack reduces risk of burning the bottom). Serve warm, letting everyone tear off chunks of bread with their fingers rather than cut it.

### **The History**

The history of monkey bread is obscure, solely because so many recent recipes clog the internet. Our family swears that it originated in Albany, Texas, a little town just east of Abilene, the “Home of the Hereford.” Rather than just quote family, I did some digging. I am thankful for a citation in a blog by New Yorker Barry Popik in “Big Apple,” dated 2006, [http://www.barrypopik.com/index.php/new\\_york\\_city/entry/monkey\\_bread/](http://www.barrypopik.com/index.php/new_york_city/entry/monkey_bread/) which led me to perhaps the best source for the history of the real thing, a “Tolbert’s Texas” column by newsman Francis X Tolbert, in the 28 April 1968, copy of the *Dallas Morning News*, at section A, pg. 25, titled “*Story of Monkey Bread,*” and later in his book, “---A Bowl of Red,” Frank X. Tolbert [Texas A&M University Press: College Station TX] 1972, 1993 (p. 170-171). Quoting directly,

MRS. VIVIAN HARTMAN, a Dallas friend to whose good taste I genuflect, said: “When you go to Albany be sure and pick up some of Ann King’s monkey bread. You can buy it, I think, at the Piggly Wiggly store in Albany.”

So, when I was in Albany, Texas, last week I did buy some monkey bread and I talked with monkey bread’s inventor, Mrs. Ann King.

The monkey bread turned out to be just great. At the store it comes frozen in a 1-pound ring, like an angel food cake in conformation. You just brown it, and then become an addict.

MRS. ANN KING and her husband, Richard King, live in a neat white frame house in a mesquite grove on the outskirts of Albany. Mrs. King says that she will soon be 62, but with her fine, unlined, lemon-colored countenance she looks to be at least a dozen years younger.

We sat on the side stoop in cool sunshine, with cardinals playing around in the trees, and an Appaloosa horse watching us from a pasture across the road. And we talked, mostly about monkey bread.

“When it got so popular, and stores began carrying it here and in Abilene and other towns around close, I took out a patent,” said Mrs. King. “I understand some restaurant in Dallas is serving what they call monkey bread, but one of my customers say it doesn’t taste nearly so good as mine.”

THE KINGS are leading culinary artists in Albany. Richard King is a barbecue specialist, and there is a big barbecue pit, fed by mesquite knots, and several steel smoke houses in the yard.

“I’ve been cooking all my life, but now I just bake monkey bread here at home,” said Mrs. King. “I’m from Anadarko in Oklahoma and Richard was born here in Fort Griffin. We went out to Los Angeles during the war (World War II) and my husband was one of the first Negro men to go to work for Lockheed. I worked for a woman in Burbank who lived next to Zasu Pitts, and Miss Pitts and I became good friends. I’m telling you this because Miss Pitts helped me work out the formula for monkey bread.”

YOU REMEMBER Zasu Pitts? She was the great character actress, the sweet-faced, willowy woman with popping, bewildered eyes and she was much given to anxiously wringing her hands when before the movie cameras.

“Miss Pitts—she’s gone now—was a good cook,” said Ann King, and she displayed an autographed copy of one of Miss Pitts’ cookbooks, this one on candy making called “Candy Hits by Zasu Pitts.” “As I said, she helped me during the experimenting that finally resulted in monkey bread. Why did we call it that? Well, when we finally found the just right recipe we were being deviled by some young children. So we named it for those little monkeys.”

The book gives some additional background on Mrs. King: “

Ann King, a good-looking black woman, long ago worked out her formula for monkey bread with the late film actress Zasu Pitts. If you're a veteran viewer of movies you'll remember Zasu Pitts. She was the sweet-faced, willowy character actress with popping, bewildering eyes, and she was much given to anxiously wringing her hands when before cameras. Miss Pitts was quite a gourmet and composed several cookbooks including one called “Candy Hits by Zasu Pitts.” Ms. King won't give her formula for monkey bread [ /i] *...but we got it! See elsewhere in this post.* [ /i], but you can but it most days at the Piggly-Wiggly store in Albany, Texas, where Ann lives. At the store it comes frozen and in a one-pound pound ring, shaped sort of like an angel food cake. You just brown and become an addict. The rolls of bread are all twisted up in spaghetti snarls. I like it rather well browned and it's so 'short' you don't need any butter with it. 'I took out a patent on my version of monkey bread,' said Ann King. 'I understand some restaurant in Dallas is serving what they call monkey bread, but my customers say it doesn't taste nearly so good as mine.’”

She refers to the Nieman Marcus stores in Dallas, where well-known cook Helen Corbitt included monkey bread in the Mariposa (restaurant) offerings and in her cookbook.

More detail on Ann King comes from “Monkey bread: It's play dough for bakers” in the LA Times, <http://www.latimes.com/features/food/la-fo-monkeybread21-2009oct21,0,7695464.story#ixzz2ocL5EJSc> by Jenn Garbee, dated October 21, 2009:

“Some culinary historians speculate that monkey bread evolved from Parker House rolls, the late 19th century crescent-style rolls nestled side by side in a sheet pan (when baked in a ring mold or Bundt pan, the bread was said to resemble the prickly Chilean monkey puzzle tree).

“Others maintain it was the creation of silent film actress ZaSu Pitts and her neighbor, Ann King, a Texas housewife who moved to Burbank during the 1940s after her husband landed a job at Lockheed Martin. The women reportedly named the bread after the neighborhood children, little meddling "monkeys" who couldn't keep their fingers out of the steaming fresh-from-the-oven bread. (King opened a bakery specializing in monkey bread shortly after she returned to Texas.)”

Monkey bread's popularity continued to spread, at least in Texas.

<http://www.dmagazine.com/publications/d-magazine/1978/november/windfalls> points to “D Magazine,” November 1978, where it says

“The undisputed queen of monkey bread is 72-year-old Ann King of Albany: 400 loaves of her bread come to Dallas markets every week. Cecil Fisher at Oak Lawn's Fisher Food Store says Ann's cornered the market because, even for confirmed bread bakers, making monkey bread is a tedious process of buttering and stacking tiny triangles of dough. Her monkey bread costs \$1.29 per loaf; or try her cinnamon, garlic-cheese or whole wheat breads. Ann King bread is available at Fisher's, Goodies from Goodman, Sample House and Wall's.”

Now that it's nearly 2014 and Mrs. King would be 108 years old, it's safe to say that she has “passed on,” but I remember my in-laws talking about buying bread from her “back when.” My mother-in-law, Mrs. Ann Russ Holaday, grew up in Albany and her sister, Elizabeth Russ Eversberg, lived there nearly all her life. Ever since our marriage back in 1969, my sister-in-law (Barbara Holaday Dixon of Monument, CO) and I have collaborated via our monkey bread making efforts to make the recipe as altitude-proof (her problem) and goof-proof (my problem) as possible. The recipe at the top of this post is the result.

In the interest of completeness, I must include an Alton Brown version at <http://www.foodnetwork.com/recipes/alton-brown/overnight-monkey-bread-recipe/index.html>. In my opinion, it is harder to make and more fancy than it needs to be. There is a brown sugar and rosemary topping that my family doesn't care for. However, he's a popular TV star and I'm not, so in the interest of having ONE sticky, gooey recipe, try the link. ...if you must.