

## Yeast — StRausiq (N), StRuusiq (S)

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### STRAUSIRCUNITUQ. – IT SMELLS LIKE YEAST.

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Photo: Student bakers in Port Lions. Photograph courtesy of Sara Squartsoff.

Yeast is a single-celled microorganism, a type of fungus widely present in nature. There are thousands of varieties of yeast in the air, soil, and water, and on plants and animals. Archaeologists believe that people began incorporating yeast into bread at least 5,000 years ago. In baking, yeast works by generating carbon dioxide as it breaks down sugars. The gas forms bubbles in the dough, causing it to rise and creating delicious, fluffy bread.

In the early twentieth century, when Alutiiq ladies baked many rolls and loaves of bread to feed their families, baker's yeast was an important kitchen tool. People purchased several varieties. Cakes of yeast were the most common, although yeast packets were sometimes available. Others simply saved a small portion of their yeasted dough to start the next batch of bread, the way many Alaskans use a sourdough starter.

Women kept their yeast in a warm spot. One commonplace was in a gallon jug behind an oil-fired kitchen stove. Here women would mix cakes of yeast with the starchy water created by boiling potato. The starch provided sugars to feed and multiply the yeast, creating leavening water the women used to make bread dough. Ladies added to this mixture periodically to keep it alive.