Prep time: 15 minutes
Cook time: 55–65 minutes
Resting time: 10 minutes
Total time: 1 hour 30 minutes
Intensity: Easy (one bowl, one pan; no special techniques)

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Ingredients

For the meatloaf:

- 2 lbs (900 g) ground beef (80/20 for best flavor and moisture)
- 1 cup fresh breadcrumbs (or panko)

- ¾ cup whole milk
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 1 medium yellow onion, finely diced (about 1 cup)
- 3 cloves garlic, minced
- 2 tbsp Worcestershire sauce
- 2 tbsp ketchup
- 1 tbsp Dijon mustard
- 1 tsp dried thyme
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- 1½ tsp fine sea salt
- ¾ tsp freshly cracked black pepper
- ½ tsp smoked paprika

For the glaze:

- ½ cup ketchup
- 2 tbsp brown sugar (light or dark)
- 1 tbsp apple cider vinegar
- 1 tsp Worcestershire sauce
- ½ tsp Dijon mustard
- Pinch of cayenne (optional)

To finish:

- 2 tbsp chopped fresh parsley
- Flaky sea salt, for serving

Equipment

- Large mixing bowl
- 9×5-inch loaf pan (or rimmed sheet pan for free-form loaf)
- Small bowl for the glaze
- Pastry brush or spoon
- Instant-read thermometer
- Wire cooling rack

Instructions

Step 1 — Prep and preheat (10 minutes | Intensity: Low)

Preheat the oven to 350°F (175°C) with a rack in the center position. Line the loaf pan with parchment paper with an overhang on the long sides for easy lifting, or lightly grease it. Combine the breadcrumbs and milk in a small bowl and let soak 5 minutes until the crumbs absorb the liquid — this panade is the secret to a moist meatloaf. Finely dice the onion — large chunks create pockets that make the loaf crumble.

Step 2 — Mix the meatloaf (5 minutes | Intensity: Low-Medium)

In the large bowl, combine the soaked breadcrumbs, beaten eggs, onion, garlic, Worcestershire sauce, ketchup, Dijon mustard, thyme, oregano, salt, pepper, and smoked paprika. Stir until evenly blended. Add the ground beef and mix with your hands just until combined — about 30–45 seconds. Overmixing develops the proteins and produces a dense, tough loaf. Stop as soon as no dry streaks remain.

Step 3 — Shape the loaf (3 minutes | Intensity: Low)

Transfer the mixture to the prepared pan and gently press into an even shape, being careful not to compact it. If using a sheet pan, shape into a 9×5-inch free-form loaf. Smooth the top with a spatula. For a classic look, press a shallow indentation down the center — it helps the glaze pool and keeps the loaf from doming. Do not pack tightly.

Step 4 — Bake (35 minutes | Intensity: Low — mostly unattended)

Bake uncovered on the center rack at 350°F (175°C) for 35 minutes. The loaf should be set around the edges but still slightly soft in the center, with an internal temperature around 145°F (63°C). If the loaf releases a lot of fat, carefully tilt the pan and spoon off the excess — or use a turkey baster.

Step 5 — Glaze and finish baking (20–25 minutes | Intensity: Medium)

While the loaf bakes, whisk together all the glaze ingredients in the small bowl. After the first 35 minutes, brush half the glaze generously over the top of the loaf. Return to the oven and bake 15 minutes, then brush with the remaining glaze and bake 5–10 minutes more, until the glaze is sticky and caramelized and the internal temperature reaches 160°F (71°C) in the center. Watch the glaze — sugar burns quickly in the final minutes.

Step 6 — Rest (10 minutes | Intensity: None)

Remove from the oven and let the meatloaf rest 10 minutes in the pan before slicing. This is not optional — resting allows the juices to redistribute, and slicing early means a crumbly, dry loaf. Lift out using the parchment overhang and transfer to a cutting board or platter.

Step 7 — Slice and serve (2 minutes | Intensity: Low)

Slice into 8 thick slices with a sharp serrated knife using a gentle sawing motion. Scatter with fresh parsley and a pinch of flaky salt. Serve with mashed potatoes, green beans, or a simple garden salad.

Chef’s Notes & Troubleshooting

- Meatloaf dry? Use 80/20 beef, don’t overmix, and don’t skip the panade. Also avoid overcooking — pull it at 160°F.
- Crumbly and falling apart? The mixture was overmixed or the onion was too coarsely chopped. Mix gently and dice finely.
- Greasy? 80/20 beef renders a fair amount of fat — spoon it off mid-bake, or use 85/15 for a leaner loaf (slightly less moist).
- Glaze burning? Add the second coat of glaze later, or tent the top loosely with foil if it’s darkening too fast.
- Loaf domed and cracked? Press the center indentation before baking and don’t

overpack the pan.

- Make it ahead: Assemble the raw loaf up to 24 hours ahead, cover, and refrigerate. Add 10 minutes to the bake time. Or bake fully, cool, and freeze up to 3 months.

- Leftovers are the point: Cold meatloaf sandwiches on white bread with mayo and lettuce are a legitimate reason to make this recipe.

Nutrition (per slice — 1 of 8, with glaze)

Nutrient	Amount
Calories	~390 kcal
Protein	25 g
Total Fat	24 g
— Saturated Fat	9 g
Carbohydrates	17 g
— Fiber	1 g
— Sugars	10 g
Cholesterol	120 mg
Sodium	~780 mg