

Basic Bread



Here's what you'll need

Ingredients

- 5 cups all-purpose or bread flour
- 1 package active dry yeast (3 teaspoons)
- 2 cup warm water (warm not hot)
- 2 tbs sugar
- 2 tsp salt
- 1 tbs extra-virgin olive oil

Tools

- 1 large mixing bowl
- 1 small mixing bowl
- wooden spoon or spatula
- measuring spoons
- wet measure
- dry measure

Here's what you do

*First, you have to activate the yeast. You do this by dissolving a teaspoon of the sugar in a small bowl, adding about a cup of your warm water, and then adding the yeast. Let that hang out for a few minutes. You'll see the yeast start to kind of foam up a bit; that's called blooming.



Yeast is actually alive, you know. It's just asleep. Yeast is a microscopic fungus (ugh), but a good fungus, not the gross kind. The warm water wakes it up, and then of course, after a good nap, it's time to snack. Yeast loves sugar and salt, so when it gets added into the flour mix, it starts running around like crazy and eats the food, which then leads to gas...(ugh) the good kind... thus causing the rising or proofing.

If after 5 or 10 minutes your yeast doesn't look like the above it's most likely dead and you need new yeast

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While you're waiting for the yeast, put the dry stuff in a big mixing bowl, that's four and a half cups of your flour (set the rest aside we'll need it later), the rest of sugar and salt and mix it all up. After it's mixed, form a well in the center of the flour. Put your bloomed yeast and olive oil into the well.

Now the fun part: Get your hands in there! If you don't want to get your hands dirty no worries, use a wooden spoon or spatula. Mix all the stuff in the bowl together until it all sort of gums together. At first it should be more dry than wet, and sorta flaky and falling apart. A little at a time, add more water until it forms a sticky mass.



Okay, now remember that flour you set aside? Good. Sprinkle some of that on your work station. Now pull that sticky mass out of the bowl and onto the flour. Dust some more flour over the top. The dough should be sticky, but not wet and goopy. If it is too sticky that's no problem. First, just fold the dough with the flour, and if after a couple minutes it's still driving you nuts, just add a little more flour until it's manageable. Really sticky isn't bad. In fact it's better. It's just annoying to work with. Now start to fold and press the dough on to itself, left to right, up to down. This is called kneading. Keep doing this for about 5 to 10 minutes, and the dough should become relatively smooth and easier to work with as time goes on.



Now, put the dough back in the bowl, cover with a towel or something, and let it hang out in a warmish area... Okay, you done good kid. Now, we wait for a half hour to an hour or so, basically until the dough doubles in size. See you then.

Hey so what did you do while you were waiting? I made tomato sauce and then started drinking wine...and then sorta just kept drinking wine...

...anyway from here you can use this same dough to make all kinds of different bread from a regular old loaf for Sammy's or something like focaccia, dinner rolls, ciabatta or even pizza. Follow the direction below to make...



Ciabatta:

Tools

- 1 or 2 baking sheets
- 1 knife or dough cutter
- 1 oven friendly pan (optional)

Ingredients

- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup hot water (optional)

This recipe should yield around 10 buns, depending on the size you choose. So if you have 2 baking sheets you can get it all done at once. If not no worries you'll just have to rounds of baking. Place your dough on a lightly floured surface, flatten into a rectangle, and press out all the air and bubbles (you should hear a bunch hissing and popping). Okay, now the tricky part...well, for some maybe... fold the right side of the dough into the middle, then left into the middle, now the top down to the middle and the bottom up. Press in each fold firmly.



Flip what should be your relatively square shaped dough smooth side up. Cover it up and let it rest for about an hour. Easy right? Good, now do that exact same thing two more times. Okay so now you should have folded and rested your dough three times and are on the final step before baking. It takes some work and time, but it's soooo worth it! Okay, now flatten the dough out into a rectangle one last time. Don't worry about getting all the air. In fact, leave some in. Take a knife or dough cutter and cut the dough in half long ways. Now in the other direction, cut out rectangular or triangular portions...is triangular a word?...

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Anyway place the portions evenly spaced apart on a floured (or you can use parchment) baking sheet. Move tray/trays to the oven top, and pre-heat the oven to 450f/230c. At this point, you can also add a pan of hot water on the bottom rack of the oven. (The steam reacts with the sugars to create a super delicious crust.)



Once the oven heats, bake for 15 minutes.