



French bread

(Baguette, Bâtard, rolls)

This is a 10 step guide to how I make our go to bread. There are so many types of breads and so many techniques used in bread baking. This is the result of years of learning, practice, and experimentation. There are some things that I probably can't convey in this quick guide, there are entire books dedicated to bread baking and I recommend reading some of these books or some websites, such as

<http://www.thefreshloaf.com/>

Ingredients:

500 grams all-purpose flour
 330 grams water (luke warm)
 11 grams salt
 1 TBS honey
 1 packet yeast
 1 heaping TBS of vital wheat gluten

Step 1: Hydrate the yeast.

In your mixing bowl, add the luke warm water, stir in the honey, and sprinkle the yeast evenly across the top of the water. Cover the bowl with a tea towel and leave it alone for 15 minutes.



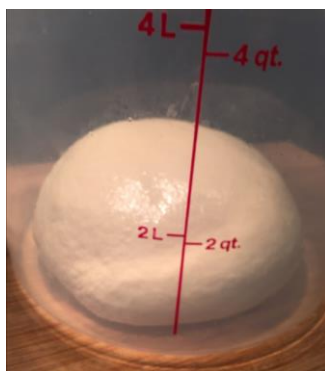
Hydrate the yeast

Step 2: Add the rest of the ingredients

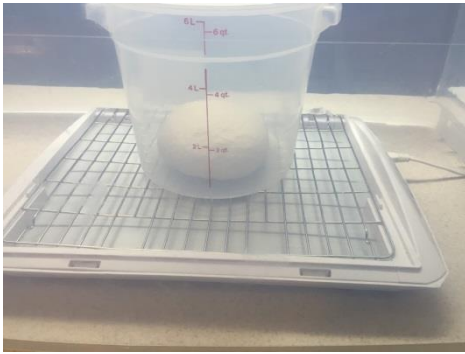
After the yeast is rehydrated, you should see some foaming in the yeast water. Add the flour and wheat gluten first, and then add the salt. In a stand mixer with a dough hook, start mixing the dough on low until the dry ingredients are moist and the dough begins to form. Turn the speed up to medium low and let the mixer knead the dough for 15 minutes.

Step 3: Knead and form the dough for the 1st rise

Lightly oil a large bowl or container for the dough to rise in. With just a slight amount of olive oil on your hands, remove the dough from the mixing bowl. The dough should be tacky but not super sticky. Knead the dough by hand for a minute or two and form into a ball. Place the dough ball into the bowl or proofing container covered with a lid or plastic wrap.



1st Rise



Proofing box



Form the loaves for 2nd rise



Second rise

Step 4: 1st rise - proofing the dough

In a warm area of the house, place the dough to rise. The top of the refrigerator is a decent place. I have a few ways that I will proof the dough faster by keeping the temperature at 90F, but at room temperature it will rise, just slower. Also, a slow fermentation adds flavor and character. At first I used this proofer

<http://amzn.com/B005FCZMU6> but I couldn't make long loafs such as baguette in it. So I made a proofer out of a large plastic bin turned upside down over the smaller proofers base that has the heating element. You want the dough to double in size, usually about 1 hour or longer depending on the temperature.

Step 5: Form the bread dough

Remove the dough from the proofing container onto a large work surface, I have a very large cutting board that I use, but a clean counter or large silicon mat would work as well. For baguettes, cut dough in thirds. For Batards, cut dough in half. For rolls, cut into eight pieces. Trying not to de-gas the dough too much, form the loafs. Gently stretch the dough into a slight rectangle without degassing the dough much. Stretch and fold the dough and pinch it sealed. Gently roll the dough from the middle with slight pressure to stretch the dough to the length and thickness that you desire, this may take several times of gently rolling it. The important thing is to try not to degass the air bubbles out of the dough or work it too hard that it may split.

Step 6: Second rise

Place bread doughs on a cookie sheet lined with parchment paper. Place cookie sheet in proofer, or cover loosely with plastic wrap or a slightly damp tea towel and allow to rise and double in size 1 to 1½ hours generally.

Step 7: Prepare oven

Preheat oven to 500F. To get the good crustiness, we need to create steam in the oven. There are two ways to do this. As the oven is preheating, place a cookie sheet on the lower rack of the oven. Make sure this isn't a special or expensive cookie sheet, doing this several times will generally ruin the cookie sheet for other purposes, I have a designated one. The other route is to pour the water on the base of the



Score the dough



These loaves were scored a little too horizontally



Allow the bread to cool

oven, I don't prefer this method and never do this if you have exposed elements. Either way, we don't add the steam until we put the bread in there, but we need the oven and cookie sheet

Step 8: Score the bread

Scoring the dough is important to control the expansion of the bread as it rises quickly in the oven. If you don't score the bread, it will inevitably split, usually on the sides or the seam. Scoring the bread can be done with a number of tools, I've used them all. A very sharp knife works, even a serrated blade can work decently. Stainless steel straight razor blade or scalpels (if you know somewhere to get those) work well too. And finally, a baker lame is probably the best tool for scoring bread, I finally broke down and purchased one on amazon. It's not necessary if you don't have one, but if you make bread often it's nice to have. Scoring a baguette can be done a few ways, though you should generally be scoring diagonally but more lengthwise than horizontally with several cuts, such as five, that are slightly overlapping. A deep vertical cut will cause a slightly flatter baguette with a bigger lighter part of the crust, an angled cut will cause a slight lip to form.

Step 9: Bake the bread

Place the bread in the oven and immediately pour a cup of water into your lipped cookie sheet or the bottom of the oven and close the door. After 5-10 minutes reduce the heat to 425F. Baking time is usually 18-20 minutes depending on the type of loaf you make, but you can generally tell that it's done by tapping the bread and hearing a nice hollow sound and the color should be a golden brown. I usually check a loaf with an instant read thermometer and it should read 210F in the center.

Step 10: Allow the bread to cool

While it's completely understandable to just break into a fresh loaf of bread, allowing it to cool on a cooling rack will make for a better loaf later. Enjoy!