

This is a very basic French bread recipe which can be used for boules or baguettes. It's deceptively simple and is something that can be baked without the recipe after a while. We prefer to make this the same day we make Chicken Soup because there's nothing better than fresh bread and hot soup.

Ingredients

- 2 cups warm water (105 to 115 degrees)
- 1½ tablespoons active dry yeast
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 3 cups bread flour
- 1 tablespoon salt
- About 3 cups white all-purpose flour
- Cornmeal for sprinkling on the parchment
- 1 large egg beaten with 2 teaspoons water, for glazing

Directions

1. In the bowl of a heavy-duty stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment pour the warm water, stir in the sugar, and sprinkle the yeast over the top. Let stand at room temperature until dissolved and foamy. About 10 minutes.
2. Add 2 cups of the bread flour and the salt. Beat hard until smooth, about 3 minutes. Add the remaining 1 cup bread flour and most of the all-purpose flour, about ½ cup at a time, until you get a rough dough that pulls away from the sides.
3. If kneading by hand, turn dough out onto a lightly floured silicon surface and knead until soft, silky, and resilient to tearing, about 5 to 8 minutes. If necessary dust the surface with flour, 1 tablespoon at a time, to keep from sticking. If kneading by machine, insert the dough hook and run on low (2) speed for 2 to 4 minutes.
4. Place the dough in a *lightly* greased deep bowl turning once to coat the ball. Cover lightly with plastic wrap and allow to rise in a cool area until tripled in size, 1½ to 2 hours. If you have time for a second rise, push down the dough and allow to rise for 1 more hour. You can let the dough rise in the refrigerator overnight.
5. Gently deflate the dough and turn out onto a lightly floured silicon surface. Line a baking sheet with parchment and sprinkle lightly with the cornmeal. Divide the dough into three equal parts (works out to about 15½ ounces each). Knead in a little more flour now if the dough seems particularly sticky. Shape the dough into tight round balls for boules or flatten each portion into a rectangle for baguettes. Roll each rectangle up tightly to form a long baguette shape and roll to adjust for length.

Baking

There are two ways to bake this bread. With the quick method, immediately after forming the loaves, slash the tops diagonally no more than ¼ inch deep and brush the entire loaf with the glaze. Place in a *cold* oven on the middle or lower rack. Turn the oven to 400 degrees and bake for 30 to 35 minutes.

With the traditional method, preheat a baking stone to 450 degrees for at least 20 minutes. If not using a baking stone preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Cover the loaves lightly with plastic wrap and allow to rise until doubled in size, about 30 to 40 minutes. Remove the plastic wrap, diagonally slash the loaves no more than ¼ inch deep, and brush with the glaze. If using a stone turn the oven temperature down to 400 degrees and place the parchment on the stone, otherwise put the baking sheets on the middle or lower rack and bake for 30 to 35 minutes.