

# **The Fresh Loaf Pocket Book of Bread Baking**

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## Preface (by a new baker)

Now even though I have been co-moderating and administering a popular bread baking forum, The Fresh Loaf ([www.thefreshloaf.com](http://www.thefreshloaf.com)), since my husband started it in 2005, I have never actually baked a loaf of bread. At least I hadn't until a few weeks ago after we started talking about condensing the best lessons on the website into an introductory bread baking e-booklet.

As the wife of a serious bread enthusiast, it had honestly never occurred to me to try baking bread. My ventures into the kitchen have tended to be to make things like cookies and cakes, and while I love decorating sweets, the prospect of dealing with yeasts and crumbs and crusts I tended to find, well... *intimidating*. To be frank, I have a bit of a fear of baking in general - when Floyd and I first started spending time together, we had more than one date which involved rescuing pieces of charcoal black yams from the oven or helping me turn off the fire alarm.

So when we decided to embark on this project and he asked me if I would be the guinea pig, my first reaction was to burst out laughing and wonder if he was wanting me to make some soup to soak the bricks I'd surely bake too, but then it occurred to me that if *I* could bake a loaf using the directions here, then anyone could (in fact, he was tactless enough to say as much).

When I did my test run through the first recipe here, I had a few moments of panic and asked many questions, but my bread came out great! In fact, the photos you will see in the intro are actually my first loaves - they may not win any awards, but they were my *first* breads! Our kids, who are used to eating home baked bread, loved them too. They scarfed down an entire loaf before Floyd could even get home to have a taste. And the next day, when we were expecting guests, I baked them again and they came out even better! I found the whole experience pretty exciting and while I don't know that I'll become the main baker in the house, I am not afraid of it anymore.

Since then we've made adjustments to this booklet to address the issues I encountered and the questions I had. We hope you'll be able to bake your first loaf without experiencing those panic attacks and that your first loaves turn out as well as mine did.

Happy baking!

- Dorota

# Introduction

Have you ever baked bread before? It's a blast. You might have heard that bread baking is really tough and, yes, to become a master baker takes a lot of work but, honestly, at heart it is a simple process that you have down after only a few tries. From that base you can develop endless variations and have a wonderful time baking bread.

There is a lot I want to tell you about the science and craft of bread baking but if you haven't actually gone through the process, what I say is going to sound like gobbledegook. So before we delve into any theory or I give you any advices, let's try baking a loaf.

The recipe below is dead simple. I've seen first time bakers make beautiful loaves using it. That said, I've also seen a few run into trouble. My hope is that this can be a delicious introduction to bread baking for you. If not, try to have fun and get a few laughs out of the process. Remember that you are only out about a buck or two for the ingredients involved and you can chalk it up as a learning experience. You'll nail it next time, right?

With that said, let's start baking!

## A Basic French Bread



This recipe makes 1 loaf. You can double or triple the ingredients if you want to make more loaves, but I suggest the first time you start with one loaf and scale up once you've got a handle on it.

### What you need

#### Ingredients:

- Flour (all purpose or bread, whichever is available)
- Salt
- Water
- Yeast (instant, Rapid Rise, or bread machine recommended)
- Sugar

#### For gear you need:

- A wooden spoon or something else strong to stir with
- A large mixing bowl
- A measuring cup
- A teaspoon measuring spoon
- A large cookie sheet or baking pan
- Plastic wrap, large food-safe plastic bags, or kitchen towels
- A solid work surface like a cutting board, table top, or counter top
- A sharp knife
- An oven

## How much to time expect it to take

Budget 4 hours the first time you try this. It doesn't take 4 hours of solid work -- there is one 90 minute break and another 60 minute break in there -- so you can easily sneak out to pick up the kids or run some errands if you need to. But figure you should set aside "a morning", "an afternoon", or "an evening" the first time you bake this.

## Ready? Let the baking begin!

**Flour.** Start by measuring out your flour. You need 2½ cups worth. Try to measure out fairly level cups and don't pack the cups too tight; tightly packed you can fit nearly twice as much flour in a cup as you can when it has been sifted and is light and full of air. You don't need to sift it or do anything special here. Just take two and a half normal, level scoops of flour and pour them into your mixing bowl.

**Salt.** Add a teaspoon of salt to the bowl containing the flour.

**Sugar.** Add a teaspoon to the bowl.

**Yeast.** You only need a teaspoon of yeast for one loaf. If you have one of those little packets of yeast from the grocery store each one contains more than that, so you can scoop out what you need and save the rest for another day.

If you are using instant, rapid rise, or bread machine yeast, mix the yeast in with the rest of the dry ingredients. If you are using "active dry yeast", mix the yeast in with ¼ cup of the warm water and let it sit on the counter for 5 minutes to activate.

## Activate your dough

Stir together the dry ingredients. Now draw **1 cup of warm water** (minus ¼ cup if you are proofing your active dry yeast in some of the water already) and pour it into the bowl with the dry ingredients (add the active dry yeast water too if that is what you are using). Stir everything together as best as you can with your spoon. After a minute or so it'll get tough to stir with a spoon and you'll probably want to switch to mixing the dough using your hands.

Now is the time to remove any watches or jewelry you have on, roll up your sleeves, and prepare to get goey! Wetting your hands before you grab the dough helps reduce how much it sticks to you, but I'd expect to be picking dough off your fingers in a short while.

Also, it is worth noting that now that you've added the water and mixed things up your dough is alive. I'll talk about this in more detail later, but just be aware that you've got a living, feeding organism on your hands now! If you step away from the bowl for twenty minutes, it'll probably look a bit different when you come back.

As you mix with your hands, the first thing you need to do is to finish getting all the ingredients evenly mixed together and to make sure that any chunks of dry flour get incorporated into the rest of the dough. Then you'll want to start kneading the dough on your work surface.

## Kneading

Usually I start kneading by sprinkling a tablespoon or so of flour onto my work surface and placing the ball of dough on it. That said, flour can behave a lot differently depending on how fresh it is, how humid the air is, and what kind of wheat it is made of, so as the dough comes together you'll need to make a judgement call. If your dough is hard and dry, not at all tacky to the touch, keep wetting your hands and working the water off them into the dough until it softens up. If the dough is so wet that it constantly sticks to your hands and the work surface, you can sprinkle a tablespoon or so of flour on it or your hands and work that into it as many times as necessary for it to get to a manageable consistency. Wetter dough actually makes better bread and should tighten up some as times goes on, but it does make this step more difficult. If your dough looks like this:



Don't panic! This should still come out fine, just rub your hands with flour and scrap it off the surface.

Knead the dough for as long as you comfortably can, 10-20 minutes. It isn't important exactly how you knead the dough, just keep squishing it, folding it, squashing it, pulling it, and generally beating



the dough up for a good long while. Try to keep the dough together as one chunk you work with and minimize tearing it. The dough will start out somewhat lumpy but should get smoother and stringier as the kneading goes on. The last time I made this, I kneaded it for 20 minutes, wetting my hands every 5 minutes or so.

When the dough gets noticeably silkier or you get tired of kneading, shape the dough into a ball and, with wet hands, coat the outside with moisture. Place the ball of dough back in your mixing bowl and cover the bowl with plastic wrap, a garbage or plastic grocery bag, or a damp kitchen towel. Set this bowl aside while the dough rises.

### **Rising (Primary Fermentation)**

You want to wait until the dough has noticeably risen before moving on to the next step. Most cookbooks say until the dough "doubles in size" but you don't need to measure it. Just eyeball it, and when you'd say "Yup, that is about twice the size it started at" you can move on. If it is hot in your house it could get there in as little as 60 minutes. On cold days in a cool room it can take a couple of hours. 90 minutes is a good plan for this recipe, but trust your instinct about whether to move on sooner or leave it longer. And if you get tied up doing something else and don't check on it for a while longer, relax: dough is pretty forgiving.

### **Shaping**

Sprinkle a tablespoon or so of flour on your work surface. Tip your bowl over and dump or scrape your ball of risen dough onto your work surface. Shape the dough by using your hands to stretch and flatten it a bit on a work surface. You don't want to make it pancake thin or squeeze all of the air out of it, you just want to stretch it out a little so it makes a rectangle-ish shape that is one to two inches thick.

Fold the dough in thirds like you are folding up a business letter. Roll the resulting rectangle up into a log. Where the seam from the end of the roll is, pinch the dough a few times so that the seam closes tight. You can roll the entire creation back and forth a few times with the palms of your hands until you've got a log a couple of inches across and 10 to 15 inches long. Place the shaped loaf on a baking sheet with the seam side facing down toward the pan. So it'll stay moist, cover your loaf loosely with plastic or a damp cloth -- I like to put the whole sheet in a clean kitchen trash bag -- and set it aside to rise for another hour or so.

### **Final Rise**

Around 45 minutes after this rise started, position your oven shelves and preheat your oven to 465. I like to bake on the second shelf from the bottom of my oven, so I put my shelves on the bottom and second from bottom position. Every oven is different though, so use whatever position you usually use to bake.

### **Baking**

When the oven is hot and your loaf appears to have nearly doubled in size, remove the plastic or

towel covering the loaf. Take your sharp knife and quickly make a slash down the length of the loaf roughly ½ an inch deep, trying to not drag the knife or deflate the risen dough too much.

Now place the pan with your loaf on it in your oven. After 5 minutes of baking at 465 degrees, reduce the oven temperature to 425 degrees. After 5 minutes more (around the 10th minute of baking) rotate the pan 180 degrees so that the loaf bakes evenly and leave it in the oven for another 10-15 minutes. The total baking time should be between 20-25 minutes. By that point the loaf should have a nice tan to brown exterior and be baked through to the center. Remove the pan from the oven and set it aside to cool for at least 10 or 15 minutes before trying to slice it.

Well, how did it turn out? Hopefully something like this:



Maybe not award winning, but hopefully delicious and definitely recognizable as bread.

If you ended up with something that is more like a pancake or brick: well, we've all baked a few of those. With a bit of practice you'll get a hang of it, so don't give up!

So what just happened?

## **Baking Fundamentals**

### **Process**

## About Fermentation

Bread baking is all about fermentation. From the minute you mix together your yeast with your wet ingredients up until about 10 minutes after you've placed your loaf in the oven, your dough is a living, growing organism. It can be just as temperamental as the other organisms living in your household: the temperature of the room, a draft, the humidity in the air, the elevation, all of these things can play a factor in the fermentation process.

What happens during fermentation? The yeast you added feeds on the carbohydrates in your flour and sugars. As it does so, the yeast releases carbon dioxide and alcohol. There is usually only a trace amount of alcohol, not enough to noticeably change the flavour of your loaf, but sometimes when you over-ferment your dough you will notice a "beery" aroma. The carbon dioxide gas is the main by-product of the fermentation process. It gets trapped in pockets in your dough and is the reason dough rises.

The biggest "secret" artisan bakers hold is that *slow fermentation produces the most flavorful bread*. Adding sugar to your dough speeds up the fermentation process -- as does adding more yeast or rising it in a warm place -- but all of those work as artificial accelerants. They are like giving candy to a six year old: surely it'll speed things up, but it isn't healthy or sustainable. The longer and slower the fermentation is, the more time the yeast will have to break down the complex carbohydrates in the flour and release the naturally occurring sugars trapped within. If there is one bit of baking wisdom you come away with from this e-book, it's that: less yeast, less sugar, more time are the key to teasing complex flavors out of a very simple set of ingredients.

That said, not all recipes require slow fermentation to taste delicious.

Now let's talk about the stages you go through when preparing a loaf of bread.

## Mixing

Mixing your dough is necessary to combine your ingredients. Mixing also activates your yeast and starts the fermentation clock ticking.

There are a number of different techniques folks use to mix. One I like is to combine all of my dry ingredients in a bowl but withhold a cup or so of the flour. I add the wet ingredients to the dry ingredients and stir them together with a wooden spoon. Then once those ingredients are well combined I sprinkle and mix in the remaining flour a quarter cup at a time. At some point the mixture will shift from a sticky batter that can be mixed with a spoon to a dough that needs to be handled by hand. At that point I pour the dough out of the bowl onto a flour covered surface like a cutting board and continue adding any remaining flour while mixing and kneading the dough.

## Kneading

Kneading is how you develop your dough and free up the protein (gluten) so that your loaf can develop the complex web of air pockets you desire in your loaf.

There are a lot of techniques for kneading, most all of which work well. I like to press down on the dough firmly with the palms of my hands, fold the dough in half, press down again, turn the dough 90 degrees, press down again, and repeat this again and again. If the dough begins sticking to the work surface or my hands too much, I sprinkle on a bit more flour.

I also often pick up my dough, swing it over my shoulder, and smack it down on my work surface. After doing that 5 or 10 times it gets pretty well stretched out. I then knead it back into a ball by hand and repeat.

The consistency of a dough will vary by recipe, but for most the dough should be tacky -- it'll make a sound like removing a sticker when you pull it off the work surface -- but not so sticky that it can't be pulled off the surface. Breads that you want large holes in like French bread should be kept a little wetter. You can adjust the moisture level up while kneading by wetting your hands repeatedly during the process or down by sprinkling flour repeatedly on your work surface.

Overkneading is very very hard to do by hand. With a stand mixer you'd have to run it for a long time, something like 25 or 30 minutes, before you overkneaded. There is a point you can reach though where the gluten starts to break down and the dough can collapse, but I've never managed to hit it.

## **Rising**

Rising, also known as *bulk fermentation*, is the period when the yeast feeds on the sugars in your dough, releases carbon dioxide, and creates gas pockets.

Yeast works faster in warmer conditions, so by controlling the temperature you can control the speed of fermentation. If you are in a hurry and want your loaf to rise quicker, you can let it rise in a warm place such as an oven with just the light bulb on or near a heat source. When I'm in a hurry I like to run my dishwasher, empty it, and place my bowl of dough in the empty dishwasher while it is still warm and wet.

Conversely, you can use your refrigerator to slow fermentation nearly to a halt. I frequently mix my dough in the evening, place it in the refrigerator (or the garage on a cool winter night), and bring it back up to room temperature the next morning to finish the baking process. I've even left a shaped loaf in the fridge for two days before remembering to pull it out of the fridge, give it an hour or so to warm up, and finally bake it. It came out fine. Just be aware that large loaves can stay cool in the middle for quite a while, so you might need to extend the baking time by 10 minutes for it to bake all the way through.

If you overrise your dough it will collapse back on itself. Ideally you degas and bake right at the point where the rise is starting to slow down: with most doughs this is around when it has doubled in size. If you do accidentally overrise your dough you certainly should go ahead and bake it anyway, but you may not get the same pop you were hoping for when you put it into the oven.

## **Degassing**

Many recipes call for punching down or degassing your dough once or twice during bulk fermentation. The reasons for this are three-fold: to extend fermentation and thus produce a more complex flavor, to aid the gluten development (more on this later), and to mix things up and allow the yeast to feed on different bits of the dough.

The easiest way to degas it to *punch down* your dough. This literally means using your fist to push down and press the gas out of your dough.

A better method of degassing high hydration doughs is *folding* your dough. To fold the dough, take the risen dough from the bowl it has been rising in and pour it top-side down on a well-floured work surface. Fold the dough in thirds, like a letter, gently stretching it and degassing it slightly (not completely) as you do. Turn it 90 degrees, stretch it again, and fold it in thirds the other direction, creating a little packet of dough. Flip the dough over, dust off as much of the raw flour as you can, and place it back into the bowl.

When you fold the dough you will feel the dough begin to strengthen. Some degassing occurs during this process, but more importantly the gluten develops and your gooey, sloppy dough should tighten up. This reduces the spreading and improves the ability of your loaf to retain its shape, hopefully helping you end up with something that looks more like a baguette and less like a pancake.

## Shaping

Shaping low hydration, panned doughs is pretty simple: flatten the dough with your hand and roll it up into a little log the length of your pan and place it seam side down in your pan. Wet rustic doughs are more difficult to shape.

When shaping a rustic loaf, a good part of what you are doing is creating surface tension. This helps your loaf keep its final shape despite the slackness of the dough. You achieve this increase in surface tension by forming a tight seam on the bottom of the loaf. The tighter you can make it and the more you can increase the surface tension on the outside of the loaf, the better it'll keep its shape.

While shaping you want to degas and agitate the loaf a little. I'm still working on finding the right amount of degassing to do. I used to really punch down and remove all the gas, but if you do that you end up with a very even, tight crumb. (By crumb, I mean the inside of your loaf - so a tight crumb means that the texture of the bread will have small holes.) Then I went through a phase of not degassing at all and I would find my loaves would run out of steam and not get much of a final rise. Somewhere in the middle is what you are shooting for: you want to let some air out and give the yeast more sugars to feed on without wrecking all of the work they've done already.

I heard a quote something along the lines of "A baker has to have an iron hand in a velvet glove." It really seems to be true: there are times to be extremely delicate, but other times to treat your dough roughly. Knowing when to apply the right amount pressure is something that requires much experience to figure out, so don't worry if your free-form loaves come out crooked or uneven initially. They'll still taste good.

## Scoring

*Scoring* is the baker's term for making slashes on your loaf. Scoring occurs right before placing your loaf in the oven and is done to control the expansion (called the *bloom* or the *oven spring*) that occurs in the first ten minutes of baking. If you don't score your loaf it will still expand, just it will do so in lopsided, unpredictable ways.

A sharp knife such as a tomato knife is a great tool to use when scoring. One or more slashes are made in the surface of the dough a quarter of an inch to half an inch deep. It takes practice to get the cut just right so that it neither sticks and drags in the dough nor deflates the loaf. Don't worry if your slashes are not beautiful at first. As long as they let your loaf expand in a predictable manner, they've served their purpose.

Pro-tip: you know the characteristic series of slashes you see on French bread? They appear to have been made diagonally across the loaf, right? In fact these cuts are made nearly straight up and down the loaf with a quarter of an inch or so of overlap. When the loaf blooms these cuts open up stretch sideways, giving that diagonal appearance. Don't be fooled!

## Preparing the Oven

At minimum you prepare the oven by preheating to the target temperature and positioning the oven shelves in your preferred position for baking. Be sure to leave enough room above the loaf so that as it expands it doesn't hit the top coils or the shelf above.

Two other things you may want to consider when preparing your oven: a baking stone and steam.

## Baking Stones

Early on, when I first started my site, I really didn't see the value of baking stones. They seemed to give a little extra pop to my loaves, but the difference seemed inconsequential.

I think I was doing a couple of things wrong. For one, I wasn't preheating my baking stone for long, and I was only heating it to my final baking temperature, typically no more than 400 degrees. Only preheating your baking stone for 15 or 20 minutes and only to 375 degrees is not enough to make much of a difference.

I also was initially using cheap, thin baking stones that didn't retain much heat. To really see the difference you need something more substantial.

So if you are going to bake regularly, I suggest you purchase a substantial baking stone. Place the stone in your oven at least half an hour before baking and turn the temperature way up to 500 or 550 degrees, whatever is the maximum temperature your oven can safely go. Let the stone get extremely hot before placing your bread on it. If you do this you'll get much better oven spring and really notice the difference between bread baked on a baking sheet and bread baked on a stone.

All that said, you don't need a baking stone to bake good bread. A cookie sheet and a preheated oven are enough to get you started.

## Steam

To achieve a thin, crackly crust, professional bakers use ovens with steam injectors. Right after placing their loaves inside, the oven is filled with steam. The steam keeps the outside of the loaves moist and supple so that the bread can spring for as long as possible. Once the outside of the loaf begins to dry out it hardens, preventing further spring. Then the crust begins to form.

Home bakers need to get creative to reproduce this effect. Some folks suggest dabbling the loaves with water before placing them in the oven, but I've found this results in a softer crust. For maximum oven spring and a crunchy crust, the trick is to get some steam in the oven early and then have the oven dry out for the remainder of the baking.

**A warning:** steam is hot. Really really hot. Steam is also wet and many electronic ovens do not like to be wet. Please use the utmost caution trying any of these techniques, and be aware that damage to person or property can occur as a result of these techniques. I list them here for sake of reference but cannot take responsibility for any issues you experience if you try them yourself.

I've used a few different tricks to get steam in my oven. One is just a squirt bottle that I give the walls of the oven a good spray of water, being careful not to nail the light bulb or the window on the door, which will shatter, right before closing the oven door. The water evaporates immediately, creating steam.

Another trick I've used one is to toss a few ice cubes onto the floor of my oven when I place my loaves in the oven.

My current method is to place a heavy iron pan that I found at a thrift store on the shelf below my baking stone. This pan gets extremely hot, so I pour a cup of hot water or throw a handful of ice cubes into it right after I place my loaves in the oven. Quite a bit of steam is created.

Another trick that a lot of folks on my website use is to take an aluminum turkey pan and place it over their loaves for the first 10 minutes of baking. There is enough moisture in the loaf itself that adding additional water is unnecessary. This approach seems lower risk than the other methods, though one does still need to be careful about releasing steam when removing the pan just as you do anytime you remove the lid from something hot.

As I mentioned, people have had their ovens malfunction after using heavy steam. Newer, more computerized ovens appear to be more vulnerable to moisture related problems. Vapor burns are a very real risk when doing this. And I'm sure warranties are voided by these techniques. "Baker beware" is the mantra when using any of these: what is good for your crust could be very bad for health or your pocketbook.

## **Baking**

As soon as your dough hits the hot oven, the baking starts. The yeast in your loaf has one last feeding frenzy before it dies off, which causes a final pop that is often called *oven spring* or *blooming*. Your loaf can rise as much as an additional 30 or 40 percent at this time, and this is when the parts of the loaf that you scored (sliced) will stretch and possibly tear.

The yeast will begin to die and your loaf stop expanding when it reaches a temperature of around 120 degrees. At that point you want to continue baking until enough of the moisture from your dough has evaporated that it stiffens and is no longer gummy. It also often makes sense to rotate your loaf 180 degrees at least once, because few ovens heat evenly.

## **Cooling**

Bread purists will tell you you should always wait until your loaves cool before slicing them. There are legitimate reasons for this: bread continues to cook while it cools off, flavors continue to develop, and the crumb (inside of your loaf) solidifies, making slicing much easier. That said, slathering butter on a slice of home-baked bread fresh out of the oven is one of the most pleasurable experiences I know, so don't not feel guilty if you don't have the patience to wait!

## **Storage**

The rules for bread storage are very simple. Crusty bread are best stored in paper bags. Soft breads should be stored in something air-tight like a sealed plastic bag.

Crusty bread can be put in paper as soon as it comes out of the oven. Softer breads should be cooled down to room temperature before being placed in a plastic bag or else they will steam up the bag, which can lead to mold development.

Once cool, either type of bread can be wrapped in plastic and frozen. Give the loaf an hour or two to defrost at room temperature and then treat it as you would a fresh loaf of that style bread. Reheating a loaf in the oven for 5 or 10 minutes can also restore some of the crackle to the crust.



## Ingredients

At its core, bread is just four ingredients: flour, water, salt and leaven (yeast). That's it. Many recipes include other ingredients – sweeteners like sugar and honey, nuts and fruits to change the flavor or texture, fats like oil or butter to soften the loaf – but these four are the fundamental pillars of any bread recipe. Understanding the role each of these four play is critical to building confidence as a baker.

### Flour

Flour is the body of bread. It provides the substance as well as the food for your leaven.

The flour used to make bread is made of wheat. Wheat seeds (known as berries) are harvested, dried, and ground to make flour. The husk of the berry (known as the *bran*) is removed before grinding most flour, though in the case of *whole wheat flour* the bran is ground up as well.

Wheat contains proteins such as *gluten* that are necessary for a loaf to hold its shape. Higher protein wheat is known as “hard” wheat, whereas “soft” wheat is lower in protein. Bakers tend to use hard flours in things that contain lots of large holes in them like French Bread and reserve softer flours for things with small holes like cakes and muffins.

Standard flour is known in North America as *All Purpose Unbleached Flour* (*AP flour*, for short). AP flour is made of a blend of soft and hard wheat and is, as the name suggests, formulated to be useful for most any type of baking. It certainly is adequate when you start baking bread.

*Bread Flour* is made of harder (higher protein) wheat. You do not need to use bread flour to bake bread. If you do use bread flour you are likely to end up with a chewier, holier (meaning “containing larger holes”, not “more divine”) texture.

Conversely, *Cake Flour* is made out of softer wheat. Cake flour (sometimes labeled *Pastry Flour*) is very soft and produces a crumbly loaf with lots of evenly sized small holes. This is precisely what you want when baking a cake but rarely appropriate for bread.

*Whole Wheat Flour* is made by grinding the bran as well as the berry of wheat. Standard whole wheat flour is made of ground hard red winter wheat or hard red spring wheat and produces a dark, earthy tasting flour. Increasingly popular is *White Whole Wheat Flour*, which too is made by including the bran and the berry of wheat but uses a lighter variety of wheat that has a milder taste.

*Self-Rising Flour* is all-purpose flour with a leavening agent, baking powder, already mixed in. While this can be handy when making biscuits or pancakes, self-rising flour is not appropriate for bread baking.

*Bleached Flour* is also available and can be used for bread baking but isn't advised. The

bleaching process strips many of the vitamins out of the wheat and the flavor along with it. I'd only advise using bleached flour if you are trying to make a truly white white bread.

Flour can be made by grinding other grains too. *Rye flour* is the most common non-wheat flour. Because Rye grows well in cooler, wetter climates many recipes from Northern and Eastern Europe make use of rye flour.

You can find flour made of ground spelt, corn, rice, teff, barley, and even lentils. While each of these can add interesting texture and flavor to your loaf, none of these grains contain the same concentration of protein that wheat does that allows you to make a light, airy loaf. Most often it is necessary to mix these flours with wheat flour to produce something that at all resembles what most people call bread.

## **Yeast**

Yeasts are tiny micro-organisms. When you purchase baker's yeast in the grocery store the cells are dormant. When warmed, mixed with water, and exposed to a food source (flour) the yeast cells activate and begin feeding. This process of yeast feeding on sugars and releasing carbon dioxide is *fermentation*.

The two most common kinds of yeast one can find in grocery stores are *active dry yeast* and *instant yeast*.

Active dry yeast is the most common kind of yeast. Active dry yeast performs best when it is activated prior to being added to your dough (a process often referred to as *proofing the yeast*). Typically this is done by mixing the yeast in a small amount of warm water for 5-10 minutes prior to mixing it into the dough. Any time you bake with active dry yeast, be sure to check the label on your packet and follow the activation instructions.

*Instant yeast* (also known as *bread machine yeast* or *rapid rise yeast*) comes in smaller granules than active dry yeast. Instant yeast can be activated prior to being incorporated with your dough but does not require it.

Instant yeast is more potent and more forgiving to bake with than active dry yeast and is what I use in all of the recipes in this e-book. If you have active dry yeast on hand and want to substitute it into one of these recipes, just add a little bit more than what the recipe calls for -- say 2½ teaspoons instead of 2 teaspoons -- and don't forget to proof it first! It also may take a little bit longer to rise, so don't worry if it takes two hours to achieve the rise I suggest you can get in 90 minutes.

One bit of advice about buying yeast: in a grocery store you can get small pre-measured packets of yeast for a buck or so each or small jars of yeast for six or seven dollars. At that price, yeast is often the most expensive ingredient in your bread. If you start baking regularly, it is worth heading to your local restaurant supply or warehouse store to purchase yeast in larger quantities. There you should be able to purchase a pound of instant yeast for under five dollars. The unused yeast can be stored in your freezer or in an airtight container in your refrigerator and should last for a couple of years.

## **Salt**

A little bit of salt is a part of the familiar flavor of bread. Salt also helps control the fermentation. If you accidentally forget the salt when making a loaf -- something I've done many times -- not only does it taste "flat" but the loaf may rise much quicker than you expect it to.

Salt comes in many different forms: table salt, sea salt, kosher salt, pretzel salt. The most important thing to note is that these salts have different densities, table or finely ground salt being the most dense. If you are substituting kosher or large-grain sea salt into a recipe that calls for table salt, you'll want to add an extra 30-50% by volume, though you should feel free to adjust the salt content to your taste.

## **Water**

Water brings the ingredients in bread together, dissolves the salt and activates the yeast. Only once you add the water does fermentation begin.

Any water that is safe enough to drink is OK to bake with. That said, if your water is high in minerals (hard), or has an off taste, or is highly treated you should consider using filtered or bottled water.

The ratio of water to flour in a dough is known as *hydration* and is one of the most important characteristics of bread. Breads with small holes in it ("tight crumb," in baker's lingo) like sandwich breads are relatively *low hydration*, meaning there is considerably less water and other liquids than flour in the recipe.

*High hydration* doughs are wetter and more difficult to handle. High hydration levels are necessary to produce the uneven pattern of holes that we expect to see in rustic breads like traditional French or Italian breads. For these types of bread, "the wetter, the better" is the prevailing wisdom.

I introduce both high and low hydration doughs in this e-book. As you gain confidence as a baker and start to experiment with recipes, keep in mind the hydration of your dough. Adding or removing 10% of the water in a recipe will give your loaf significantly different characteristics. If you want to start experimenting with recipes of your own creation, hydration is the most interesting variable to start playing with.

## **Oils, Butter, and Dairy**

Fats enrich and flavor the bread. They also soften the dough and preserve it: whereas a fat-free loaf of bread like a French bread goes stale after only a few hours, a loaf of bread with a small amount of olive oil or butter (like a sandwich bread) retains moisture and will stay fresh much longer.

Fats increase the bulk of your bread. Rarely do you get the kind of large, irregular holes inside an enriched bread as you do in a fat-free bread.

## **Sweeteners**

Sweeteners add flavor and, in some cases like honey, also delay staling. Sugars caramelize when baking, so the addition of a small amount of sweetener to your bread can significantly darken your crust.

It is a myth that yeast needs sugar in order to work the dough though. There are naturally occurring sugars in wheat that are released during the fermentation process. In fact, in high quantities, sugar can work like "junk food" for yeast and prevent a healthy fermentation process.

Sweeteners should make up no more than 5% to 15% of the flour weight. For doughs sweeter than that, pro bakers use a special strain of yeast known as *osmotolerant yeast* that you don't usually see in the grocery store but can be ordered online.

## **Additional Ingredients**

Most of the other things you find in loaves of bread like seeds, nuts, and dried fruit, significantly change the flavor and texture of your bread but do not fundamentally change the characteristics of your dough. Commercial bakers also add preservatives to their doughs since their loaves need to stay fresh for 7 to 10 days, but home bakers don't need to worry about that.

When additional ingredients do impact that feel and fermentation of your dough, it is often by absorbing or releasing moisture. Mashed potatoes, for example, can be added to your dough to soften it. Potatoes contain and release a great amount of moisture, so I always have to remember to keep my dough slightly drier than I plan on because over time the dough becomes softer rather than tightening up. And things like corn meal will soak up some of the moisture if it isn't soaked in water first.

## **Gear**

Here is a great thing about bread baking: as you saw in the introductory recipe, you don't need any special gear to get started. A cookie sheet, a mixing bowl, some measuring cups and spoons, and an old wooden spoon are enough to get going. So if you want to skip this section and get straight to the recipes, be my guest.

That said, if you bake for a while you will find there are a few things that make your experience more pleasurable and your results more reliable.

### **Bread Pans**

If you want to bake standard sandwich breads, you'll need bread pans. Bread pans come in a few different sizes and can be made of metal, tempered glass, or silicone. I use the standard-sized Pyrex pans that they sell at the grocery store and have been quite happy with them. Just be sure to grease the pans with spray oil or a little butter before placing your shaped dough in the pan or your loaf will not come out.

### **Kitchen Scale**

A kitchen scale is a great investment. Digital scales that can measure in both metric and imperial units and handle up to 8 or 10 pounds with an accuracy of 1-5 grams are inexpensive and easy to find. Professional bakers weigh their ingredients for better accuracy and easier scaling; home bakers receive the same benefits and will also find the process less complex than using measuring cups.

Some of the recipes in this book contain the weights as well as the measures. Using the weights is more reliable and simpler, but if you don't have a scale the measures work fine.

### **Probe Thermometer**

The simplest way to tell when your loaf is done is to use a probe thermometer to check the temperature in the center of it. These little guys are available for under 10 bucks and will save you from the embarrassing experience of slicing open your loaf only to discover it is still doughy in the center.

### **Baking Stone**

A baking or pizza stone increases the thermal mass in your oven and improves the final pop your loaf has when it first hits the oven.

Baking stones are available in a broad range of prices and materials. The low end ones tend to be thin and brittle -- I broke three before moving up to a mid-range stone -- so it may be worth investing a little bit more to get one that will last.

### **Stand Mixer**

I love mixing and kneading bread by hand, but found that once I purchased a stand mixer I could make more batches of bread in less time. This means I bake more often. I still find plenty of opportunities to get my hands doughy.

Stand mixers come in a huge range of sizes and prices, from just over \$100 models with plastic gears that can only mix a couple of pounds of dough to over \$1,000 semi-professional models that can handle ten pounds of dough at a time. I've been satisfied with the low end model I purchased a few years back, though I do have to be careful not to strip the plastic gears when making firmer doughs.

### **Parchment Paper**

If you get interested in making pizzas or have to transfer shaped free-form loaves from one surface to another very often, parchment paper is your friend. It goes beneath your loaf and the entire sheet can be slid directly into the oven. Every now and then I try making pizzas without it and end up swearing like a sailor, so I've found that parchment paper is well worth the minor investment.

# Recipes

There are only ten recipes in this e-book but they actually cover quite a range. The first three recipes are *rustic breads*, meaning they are higher hydration (wetter doughs) and baked free form (not in a pan). The next two are lower hydration *enriched dough* recipes meant to be baked in a loaf pan and are followed by two recipes for rolls. The final three are *sweet doughs* and contain quite a bit of butter, cream, and sugar.

An interesting thing to pay attention to is how much the other recipes deviate from the original French bread recipe. You'll see that in fact at their core all of these recipes are quite similar but with the addition of a little extra water here, the replacement of some of the white flour with whole wheat flour there, or the substitution of milk for water which will give you end a very different end result.

## Basic French Bread

If you baked the recipe in the introduction this will be familiar to you. This isn't authentic boulangerie French bread, it is more like the "French bread" you find in American grocery stores. My kids love it though and I agree it is perfect for spreading jam or soft cheeses on.



Makes 1 loaf

Prep time: 3 hours (20 minutes mixing and kneading, 90 minute first rise, 60 minute second rise, 20 minute bake)

2 ½ cups all purpose or bread flour

1 teaspoon salt

1 teaspoon sugar

1 teaspoon instant yeast

1 cup warm water

Combine the dry ingredients in a mixing bowl. Pour in the warm water and use a wooden spoon to mix the ingredients as best as you can. If the dough gets too thick to stir or does not cohere on its own, use wet hands to mash together the ingredients.



As it comes together, if the dough remains pretty dry and is not at all tacky, wet your hands a few times and work the additional water into the dough. If it is so wet that it constantly sticks to your hands and the work surface, you can sprinkle a tablespoon of flour on it and work that into it as many times as necessary for it to get to a manageable consistency.

Knead the dough for as long as you comfortably can, 10-20 minutes (if you are using a standmixer, mix for 5-10 minutes). The dough will start out somewhat lumpy but should get smoother as the kneading goes on. The last time I made this I kneaded it for 20 minutes, wetting my hands every 5 minutes or so.

When the dough is getting silkier (or you are getting tired of kneading), shape the dough into a ball and, with wet hands, coat the outside with moisture. Place the ball of dough back in your mixing bowl and cover the bowl with plastic wrap, a garbage or plastic grocery bag, or a damp kitchen towel. Set aside and let rise until doubled in size, approximately 90 minutes.

Dump or scrape the dough out of your bowl onto your work surface. If you have doubled the recipe, this is where you'll want to slice the dough in half, working one loaf at a time for the next part.

Shape the dough by using your hands to stretch and flattening it on a work surface (sprinkle the dough and work surface with flour if the dough is too sticky to handle), folding it in thirds like a letter, and then rolling the results up. Pinch the seam tight and roll the entire creation back and forth with palms of your hands until you've got a log a couple of inches across and 10 to 15 inches long. Place this on a baking sheet, cover with plastic or a damp cloth, and set aside to rise for another hour.

After 45 minutes of the rise, preheat your oven to 465 (if you have a baking stone you should place it in the oven first and start the preheating a bit sooner).

When the oven is hot and your loaf appears to have nearly doubled in size, score the loaf, add steam to the oven if you are willing to, and place the loaf in the oven. After 5 minutes reduce the temperature to 425 degrees. After 5 minutes more (around the 10th minute of baking) rotate the loaf 180 degrees so it bakes evenly and leave it in the oven for another 10-15 minutes. The total baking time should be between 20-25 minutes. By that point the loaf should have a nice tan to brown exterior and be baked through. You can check this if you have a probe thermometer by poking it into the center of the loaf. It should register between 200 and 210 degrees when the loaf is done.

## Polish French Bread

What is *polish*? A *polish* is a fancy French word for a preferment. Ah.... but what is a preferment, you ask? A preferment is a portion of the flour, yeast, and water from your recipe that is allowed to ferment longer than the rest of your dough. Extending the fermentation significantly improves the flavor of your loaf. So this is a slightly wetter version of the previous recipe with an overnight fermentation and a longer bulk fermentation (two rises instead of one). The end result is a sweeter, nuttier tasting final loaf.



Makes 2 loaves

Prep time: 10 minutes on day one, 4 hours on day two

### Polish

- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup water
- ¼ teaspoon instant yeast

### Final Dough

- 3½ cups (1 lb) flour
- 1¼ cups water
- 1 teaspoon instant yeast

2 teaspoons salt  
all of the poolish

Mix together the ingredients in the poolish in a small bowl the night before baking. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and leave the poolish out at room temperature overnight.

The next day prepare the final dough by combining the dry ingredients, then mixing in the poolish and the water. Knead the dough by hand or mix in a stand mixer using the same technique as you did for the previous recipe, 8 to 10 minutes in a mixer or 10 to 20 minutes by hand. Place the kneaded dough back into the mixing bowl, cover, and set aside to rise.

After an hour, fold the dough and place it back in the mixing bowl. Fold the dough again after another hour and return to the bowl. After two rises, remove the dough from the bowl, cut it in half, and shape each half into a "football." Place the loaves on a baking sheet, cover with plastic or a damp towel and give them a longer final rise, around 90 minutes. After 60 minutes, heat your oven (and, if you have one, your baking stone) as hot as it can safely go.

Bake, with optional steam, around 20 minutes. I suggest baking this one for 5 minutes at your oven's maximum temperature then turning it down to remainder at 465. Rotate the loaves once half way through the baking. If you have a probe thermometer, check the internal temperature of the loaves before removing them. When fully baked it should register slightly over 200 degrees.

Remove the loaves from the oven and allow to cool for a while before slicing. If you need to store this one, do so in a paper bread, wine, or grocery bag to keep the crust crisp.

## Rustic Bread

This recipe is basically the Polish French Bread with a portion of the flour replaced with whole-grain flour and the yeast reduced even more to slow down the fermentation process. This little change produces a significantly more robust loaf.



Makes 2 large loaves

Prep time: 10 minutes on day one, 5 hours on day two

### Preferment

3½ cups (1 lb) bread flour

1¼ cups (9.5 oz) water

⅛ teaspoon instant yeast

### Final dough

2½ cups (10 oz) bread flour

1½ cups (6 oz) whole wheat or rye flour or a mixture of them

1½ cups (12.5 oz) water

1 tablespoon salt

½ teaspoon instant yeast

all of the preferment

Put the yeast in the water and stir. Mix the flour and salt together in a bowl and pour in the yeasted water. Mix until the flour is hydrated, adding more water if necessary. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and leave the pre-ferment out at room temperature overnight.

To make the final dough, combine all of the ingredients except the preferment in a mixing bowl. Chop the preferment up into small pieces and mix or knead it into the final dough until they are thoroughly combined.

Place the dough back in a greased bowl and ferment for 2½ hours, punching down or folding the dough twice during that time.

At the end of the fermentation, divide the dough into two pieces and preshape each into a ball. Cover with a clean towel and let each rest for 5 to 10 minutes before shaping into the final shape. Once shaped, cover the loaves with a clean towel and set aside for a final rise, approximately 1¼ to 1½ hours.

Halfway through the final rise, begin preheating the oven to 450 degrees. If you are using a baking stone, preheat it as well.

Score the loaves right before placing them in the oven. Place them in the oven and if you are using steam, use it here to encourage proper crust development.

After 20 minutes of baking, rotate the loaves 180 degrees so that they'll bake evenly. Bake until an instant read thermometer reads around 200 degrees, which took approximately 35 minutes for my "football" shaped loaves.

## White Sandwich Bread

This is your basic white bread, great for slicing and toasting but also wonderful straight out of the oven.



Makes one loaf

Prep time: 3½ hours

3 cups flour

1 cup warm milk

1 tablespoon melted butter

2 teaspoons instant (AKA rapid rise or bread machine) yeast

1 teaspoon salt

2 tablespoons honey

Mix the dry ingredients together. Melt the butter and warm the milk -- I like to do both by putting them in the microwave together for 1 minute -- and mix them and the honey into the dry ingredients. Knead by hand for approximately 10 minutes or with a stand mixer for 5. Then put the dough back into a greased bowl, covered the bowl with plastic wrap or a damp towel, and let it rise until it had nearly doubled in size, approximately 60-90 minutes.

Shape the loaf and place it in a greased loaf pan. I like sesame seeds, so I often mist the top of the loaf with a little water and sprinkled sesame seeds on top. Enclose the bread pan in a clean plastic bag and allow it to rise for another hour.

While your dough is rising, preheat your oven to 425. Place the loaf pan into the oven and immediately reduce the oven temperature to 375 degrees. Bake for approximately 45 to 55 minutes, rotating the pans once so that they brown evenly, until the internal temperature of the loaves is around 190 degrees and the bottom of the loaf sounds hollow when tapped.

## Honey Whole Wheat Bread

I was looking for a recipe for a whole wheat bread that would taste like the rolls they used to serve at The Good Earth restaurant chain. I couldn't find anything that looked right, so I made these up.



Makes two loaves  
Prep time: 5 hours

- 3 ½ cups (1 lb) whole wheat flour
- 1 ½ cups (12 oz) hot water
- 1 ½ cups (8 oz) bread or all-purpose flour
- 1 can (5 oz) evaporated milk, milk, or water
- ½ cup honey
- 2 teaspoons salt
- 3 teaspoons instant yeast
- an additional ½-1 cup flour, as necessary, to achieve a desirable consistency

Mix the hot water and whole wheat flour together in a bowl. Cover the bowl with plastic and set aside for roughly an hour until the mixture is approaching room temperature.

Add the milk, honey, salt, yeast, and bread flour to the original mixture and mix until well

combined. Add additional flour and knead by hand or in a stand mixer until a tacky but not completely sticky dough is formed. Place the ball of dough in a well-oiled bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and set aside to rise for 60 to 90 minutes.

Divide the dough in two and shape the loaves into the pans. Place the loaves in greased bread pans, cover the pans loosely with plastic and set aside to rise again for 90 minutes.

During the final 30 minutes of rising, preheat the oven to 425 degrees. After the rise, place the pans into the oven and immediately reduce the oven temperature to 375 degrees. Bake for approximately 45 to 55 minutes, rotating the pans once so that they brown evenly, until the internal temperature of the loaves is around 190 degrees and the bottom of the loaf sounds hollow when tapped.



## Sweet Potato Rolls

The sweet potatoes give these rolls a beautiful orange color and give off a lovely earthy smell. Their impact on the flavor is minor, but they do keep the rolls soft and supple if they last long enough to store.



Makes 12 to 18 rolls

Prep time: 2½ hours assuming you've prebaked the sweet potato

- 1 average sized sweet potato, baked
- 1 cup milk
- ½ cup white or brown sugar
- 3 to 4 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 teaspoons instant yeast
- 2 teaspoons salt
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ⅛ teaspoon ground nutmeg

Bake the sweet potato for approximately 45 minutes at 375. Remove the oven and let cool.

Combine the sweet potato, sugar, and milk and stir to make a paste. Mix in 2 cups of the flour, the salt, the yeast, and the spices until thoroughly combined. Add more flour a quarter cup at a time. Mix in after each addition until you have a dough that is tacky but which you can handle with wet hands. When you hit the proper consistency, remove from the bowl and knead by hand for 5 to 10 minutes.

Set the dough aside to rise in a covered bowl for 45 minutes to an hour. Divide into a dozen or so pieces, shape, and then again allow to rise until they have roughly doubled in size, another hour or so.

Bake at 375 for approximately 20 to 25 minutes until they are beginning to turn brown.

## Buttermilk Cluster

These rolls are incredibly festive and make a beautiful compliment to any holiday feast.



Makes 12 to 18 rolls, depending on size

Prep time: 3 hours

### Dough

- 5½ to 6 cups bread or all-purpose unbleached flour
- ½ tablespoon salt
- 1 envelope (2½ teaspoons) active dry or instant yeast
- 1 tablespoon warm water
- 2 cups buttermilk
- 1 tablespoon honey

### Glaze

- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon water
- a pinch of salt

### Topping

- 2 tablespoons seeds or grains such as poppy seeds, sesame seeds, or cracked wheat

Combine the flour and salt in a large bowl. Combine the warm water and yeast in a small cup

and allow to proof for 10 minutes.

Pour the yeast, buttermilk, and honey into the flour mixture and mix well. If the dough is so dry that some of the flour won't stick, add a bit more buttermilk or water. If the dough is too sticky to knead, add more flour by the tablespoon until a manageable consistency is achieved.

Knead by machine or hand for approximately 10 minutes. Return the dough to the bowl, cover the bowl with plastic wrap or a damp cloth, and set aside to rise until the dough has doubled in size, approximately 90 minutes.

Divide the dough into 12 to 18 pieces. If you are a stickler you can scale them so that they are even, but I just cut them roughly the same size. Shape each piece into a neat ball and place in a round dish or spring-form pan close together.

When all of the rolls are in the pan, cover again with plastic or a damp towel and set aside to rise again for 45 minutes to an hour. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 425.

Uncover the rolls and brush gently with the glaze. Sprinkle on the toppings.

Bake for approximately 30 minutes, until the rolls are firm and spring back when tapped.

Unmold the rolls from the pan and serve warm.

## Cream Buns

These buns were inspired by the current scones at Murchies Tea & Coffee in Victoria, British Columbia.



Makes 12 buns

Prep time: 3½ hours

- 3 cups bread flour
- ⅓ cup sugar
- ½ cup warm milk
- ¾ cups warm heavy cream
- 1½ teaspoon salt
- 2 heaping teaspoons instant yeast
- ½ cup dried currants

Combine the flour, sugar, salt, and yeast, then mix in the milk and cream.

Knead the dough with wet hands until it is manageable, adding more flour or liquid if necessary to adjust the consistency.

Mix in the dried currants and knead the dough by hand for 10-15 minutes or in a stand mixer

for 8-10 minutes. Allow the dough to rise in a covered bowl for approximately 90 minutes until it has risen noticeably. Cut the dough into twelve even pieces, shape them into rolls, place them on a baking sheet. Cover the rolls with plastic or a damp towel and allow them to rise for another hour.

Bake the rolls on the middle shelf for 25 minutes at 375, turning them once halfway through.

While still warm, brush the top of the rolls with melted sugar and sprinkle them with powdered sugar. Serve with jam or freshly whipped cream.

## Cinnamon Rolls



Makes 12 rolls  
Prep time: 3 hours

### Dough

- 3½ cups (16 oz) all-purpose flour
- 1¼ cup (10 oz) warm milk
- 2 teaspoons instant yeast
- 2 tablespoons melted butter
- ¼ cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt

### Filling

- 4 tablespoons melted butter
- 1 cup raisins
- ½ cup brown sugar
- 1 teaspoon cinnamon
- ½ cup chopped walnuts or pecans

### Glaze

1 cup powdered sugar  
1 tablespoon lemon juice

Make the dough by combining all of the ingredients and kneading until smooth, 5 to 10 minutes. The dough should be tacky but not sticky. If it is too moist add a handful of extra flour. Place the dough in a bowl, cover the bowl, and set aside to rise until it has doubled in size, roughly one hour.

While I'm waiting for the dough to rise, I like to plump the raisins by pouring very hot water on them and letting them sit in the water for 15 minutes before draining them. This keeps them moister when you bake them, but this step isn't necessary if you are short on time.

Combine the softened butter, cinnamon, and brown sugar in a bowl to make a spread. When the dough is risen, roll it out on a floured surface and spread the filling on the risen dough. Sprinkle the raisins on top of the spread, then roll the dough up into a long roll, trying as best as you can to prevent the filling from spilling out. Slice the roll into 12 even pieces.

To slice them, first slice the roll into two even pieces. Then slice each of these pieces into two even pieces, so you have four pieces total. Each of those pieces only needs to be cut twice more and you'll have twelve pieces.

Now that your roll is cut into twelve even pieces, place those pieces in a baking pan. Cover the pan and let the buns rise for another 45 minutes to an hour until they've roughly doubled in size.

Bake the rolls at 375 degrees for 20 to 25 minutes. Be careful about oven positioning and overbaking: because there is quite a bit of sugar in the filling it is quite easy to burn the bottom of the rolls. I find that the second rack from the top works best in my oven, and I try to pull them out as soon as they look baked, but your oven may be different, so watch them carefully!

Let the rolls cool for 20 minutes or so before glazing them. The glaze will thicken as it cools, but if it is extremely runny feel free to add some additional powdered sugar to thicken it up.



## Lazy Man's Brioche

Brioche is a popular French sweet bread. It is a rich one, sometimes containing as much butter as flour, and is often shaped into intricate forms.

This version of brioche is rich but not terribly so and requires no fancy shaping or special pans to bake it in. A stand mixer and a scale are necessary to keep it completely lazy, but you can make it using measuring cups and kneading by hand.



Makes 12 buns  
Prep time: 3 hours

### Dough

- 500g bread or all purpose flour
- 250g milk
- 2 eggs
- 50g sugar
- 15g instant yeast
- 5g salt
- 1 stick (113g) unsalted butter, diced

**Filling**

½ cup chocolate chips (optional)

**Glaze**

1 egg

a pinch of salt

a teaspoon water

If using a standmixer, add all of the ingredients to your mixer and mix it until the dough becomes silky. This takes a long time, somewhere around 15 minutes. If the dough sticks to the sides or the paddle too much, take breaks and scrape the dough back down into the bowl.

If mixing by hand, combine all the ingredients and knead for as long as you can. I would suggest kneading for 5 minutes then letting the dough rest in a covered bowl for 5 minutes, then knead another 5 minutes. One more rest followed by one more knead should develop the dough pretty well.

When it is well mixed, shape the dough into a ball and place in a greased bowl. Cover and let rise until doubled in size, approximately 1 hour. Degas the dough and allow it to rise a second time, for another hour or so.

Cut the dough into 12 pieces (I used the scale and weighed them out at 3 ounces each). Shape the dough into balls. If you want to fill them, do so here by placing the chocolate chips on them before pinching them closed.

Place the dough balls seam side down in brioche pans, muffin tins, or on a baking sheet. Cover loosely with plastic and allow to rise until doubled in size and well above the pan, approximately 45 minutes.

While they are rising, make the glaze by scrambling together the egg, salt, and water in a bowl. Preheat the oven to 365.

Brush the tops of the brioche gently with egg wash before putting the pans near the middle of the preheated oven. I placed mine on the third shelf down out of four.

Bake the brioche for 10 minutes then rotate the pan. Bake them another 10 minutes or until they appear to be done.

If your pans were greased well, you should be able to shake the brioche out of the pan while they are still hot. Be careful if the eggwash spilled onto the pans though, because the cooked egg will "glue" the brioche into the pans. I had to gently break through the eggwash with a knife before I could get a few of my buns out of the pans.

Enjoy!



## Closing Notes: Experimentation

Now that you've mastered a few basic recipes it is time to experiment. How? Well, the roll recipes certainly can be shaped into loaves and baked in a pan. Likewise, any of the loaf recipes before the rolls can be divided up and baked as rolls. The rustic doughs when baked with steam produce hard rolls, while the enriched doughs make soft rolls. Just keep in mind that smaller rolls require shorter baking times than large loaves do, so follow the baking instructions for the appropriate shape (roughly 20 minutes for rolls, more like 45 to 55 for a loaf) regardless of which recipe you use.

How about adding seeds or nuts to the doughs? I love adding about half a cup of a blend of sesame, poppy, and flax seeds to the Rustic Bread. I just knead them in when the dough starts to come together. In the fall I like to mix in walnut and chopped apples. Or olives and cheese. Or herbs like fresh rosemary or dried *Herbes De Provence*. Or if you like things spicy, try adding some Tabasco or Sri Rachi. Not just the rustic dough: the white and wheat sandwich breads are tremendous with raisins and cinnamon mixed in. Use your imagination and you can come up with all kinds of creative sweet and savory creations.

# Glossary

*bloom* - The accelerated rise that your loaf experiences in it's first five minutes in the oven. See also *oven spring*.

*crumb* - The non-crust portion inside a loaf of bread. "Great crumb," coming from a baker, is a compliment.

*crust* - the exterior of a loaf of bread.

*enriched dough* - A dough that contains significant fats or oils.

*hydration* - Hydration is the amount of water relative to the amount of flour in a recipe. A *high hydration* dough is a wet dough while a *low hydration* dough is drier and stiffer.

*oven spring* - The accelerated rise that your loaf experiences in it's first five minutes in the oven.

*poolish* - A French word for a preferment

*preferment* - A preferment is a portion of the ingredients -- typically some of the flour, yeast, and water -- from your recipe that is combined early and allowed to ferment longer than the rest of your dough. Extending the fermentation significantly improves the flavor of your loaf, resulting in a sweeter, nuttier tasting final loaf.

*scoring* - Making slashes on your loaf. Scoring usually occurs right before placing your loaf in the oven and is done to control the expansion (called the *bloom*) that occurs in the first ten minutes of baking.

*slack dough* - A high hydration dough.

*soft wheat* - Wheat that is low in protein, commonly milled into cake and pastry flour.

## Further Reading

*The Fresh Loaf* (<http://www.thefreshloaf.com>). We have a wonderful community of friendly and talented bakers spanning a broad range of skills, from first time bakers to serious hobbyists to professional bakers and baking instructors. Please come join us and introduce yourself!

*Artisan Bread in 5 Minutes a Day* by Jeff Hertzberg and Zoë François (Thomas Dunne Books, 2007). Jeff and Zoë offer a clever technique that allows you to create bakery-quality breads in your own home even after a busy day at the office.

*The Bread Baker's Apprentice* by Peter Reinhart (Ten Speed Press, 2001). All of Peter Reinhart's books are good, but this remains my favorite. It does a great job of teaching the new baker about the fundamentals of the baking process and offers up a solid selection of wonderful recipes.

*Bread* by Jeffrey Hamelman (John Wiley & Sons, 2001). Hamelman's book targets the professional baker and contains a tremendous amount of baking wisdom. I found many things about it intimidating at first, but as I grew more confident as a baker it has become more and more often my "go-to" book.

There are many, many other wonderful books on special topics such as regional breads, sourdough, and gluten-free baking. Again, please come join our community to learn more and hear about other member's favorites.

# Happy Baking!

May your yeast always be fresh and your loaves always rise!