

Baguette

It's easy to make a good baguette, but a bit difficult to make a perfect baguette. With only four ingredients, not much can go wrong with the basic process, but it will take some practice to achieve perfection in loaf shaping and scoring. This is a moderately high moisture (70% hydration) dough that shows how well no-knead techniques work with higher levels of dough hydration.

Baguettes are best eaten within several hours of baking. The simplicity of the bread's taste allows the texture and crust to shine and the salt dances off your tongue in a most pleasant way.

Two Loaves	Ingredient	One Loaf
5 cups, 700 g	All-purpose flour, 92%	2 ½ cups, 350 g
½ cup, 64 g	Whole wheat flour, 8%	¼ cup, 32 g
4 tsp, 12 g	Yeast, 2%	2 tsp, 6 g
2 tsp, 9 g	Salt, 1%	2 tsp, 5 g
2 ¼ cups, 533 g	Water, warmed to 105-115 degrees, 70%	1 cup plus 2 Tbsp, 267 g

In a large bowl, stir together the all-purpose flour, the whole wheat flour, yeast and salt. Stir in the water until well mixed then stir vigorously another 15-30 seconds. Cover and allow to rise at room temperature for about two hours then refrigerate until ready to bake, OR refrigerate immediately and wait at least 12 hours to use dough.

Transfer the dough to a floured surface and divide in half if making two loaves. Fold the dough a few times then shape it into a rectangle, about 8 x 12 inches. Fold the dough from the long (wide) side as if folding a letter for a business envelope. Now, shape the dough into a cylinder while folding the end seams under a bit. For the home oven, the dough should be 14-15 inches long. Transfer the loaf to a peel seam side down or baking sheet covered with parchment and cover the loaves loosely with plastic wrap. Allow to rise at room temperature for 30-45 minutes.

Preheat the oven, baking stone and steam pan to 450 degrees. Uncover the loaves and brush or spray on a thin coating of water onto the loaves. Make three slashes in the loaf nearly parallel to the long axis of the loaf. Slide the baguette(s) onto the baking stone then turn the oven down to 400 degrees. Pour a cup of water into the steam pan and bake for 40 minutes. Remove loaves to a wire rack to cool.