

Bread-Making Basics for Beginners

Making homemade artisan bread is not only possible for the average home cook but also simple and easier than you think.

Today, I am going over some helpful bread-baking tips for beginners. You will be equipped with all the beginner bread-baking knowledge you need for your bread-making endeavors. You can make bread with just four ingredients: yeast, flour, salt, and water.

#1 Read And Follow The Recipe

When making bread, you need to read all of the instructions. Make sure to take an inventory of the equipment and ingredients you need before you begin the process.

#2 Use Quality Ingredients

Purchase good-quality ingredients. Use the type of flour and yeast recommended in the recipe. Check the expiration date of the ingredients, especially the yeast.

#3 Correctly Measure The Ingredients

Precisely measuring the ingredients is the best way to start a fail-proof loaf. My best advice for bread making is to use a kitchen scale. If you do not have a scale, stir the flour in its container to break up clumps, spoon the flour into a measuring cup and use a knife to level it off.

If the recipe includes eggs, make sure to use the correct size.

#4 Add The Salt

Adding salt to the dough will bring out the flavors and strengthen and slow down the fermentation process. Bread needs time for the gluten to develop. A dough with well-developed gluten has a better structure or crumb and crust.

The yeast and salt should be added to opposite sides of the bowl. Salt may also be added at the end of the mixing process. Salt can kill yeast, causing fermentation and rising problems, which is an essential step.

#5 Never Use Hot Liquid

The liquid should be 105 - 115°F. Yeast can be killed if the liquid is too hot. Water will add coarseness to the texture. A more refined texture will be produced if milk is used instead of water.

#6 Use Room Temperature Ingredients

Cold ingredients will slow the fermentation process and will not activate the yeast. Make sure the ingredients are at room temperature.

#7 Carefully Knead The Dough

Kneading dough helps bread develop the gluten that makes a stretchy dough. A successfully mixed dough will be elastic. If you are kneading in a mixer, stop and check the dough every two minutes to see how it is coming along. Perform the windowpane test. Grab a small ball of dough. Stretch the dough into a square until it forms a thin film in the middle without breaking. The dough needs to be thin enough that light passes through it. If you can accomplish this without tearing, the dough is properly kneaded.

Over-kneading or overworking dough frequently happens with a stand mixer. Overworked dough may feel tight and tough.

#8 Rise Dough In A Warm Spot

Place the dough in a warm spot for the first and second rises.

Yeast dough is considered “ripe” when it has risen enough – usually doubling in size. The ripe test determines if the dough is ready to be punched down and shaped. Gently stick two fingers in the risen dough up to the second knuckle and then take them out. If the indentations remain, the dough is “ripe” and ready for punch down. If not, cover and let the dough rise longer.

Many doughs will have a second rising in the pan. For the second rise test, touch the side of the dough lightly with your fingertip. If the indentation remains, the loaf is ripe and ready for the oven.

#9 Preheat The Oven

Always preheat the oven for at least 15 minutes before baking the bread.

#10 Cool The Bread Before Slicing

Bread should be cooled at room temperature. When the bread is pulled out of the oven, it is still baking and setting inside. If bread is sliced while hot, the chances of you ending up with a mushy, soggy loaf are high.

To cut fresh bread, heat the serrated knife in hot water, wipe it dry, and slice the bread on its side.

Making bread from scratch is a simple life pleasure that provides a beautiful sense of satisfaction. So, put on your favorite tunes and roll up your sleeves—it is a worthwhile investment of your time.

(Sources: www.bobsredmill.com; www.kingarthurbaking.com; milkandpop.com; sallysbakingaddiction.com)