Bread & baking / France

Baguette

The Parisian benchmark — a slow, cold-fermented dough of nothing but flour, water, salt, and a whisper of yeast, coaxed into a long blistered loaf with a shatteringly crisp crust, an open custard crumb riddled with irregular holes, and the faint sweet-wheat perfume that only time and steam can build.

Time 1200 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 100 % Bread flour (T65 or ~12% protein)
- ☐ 72 % Water (for the poolish + dough)
- ☐ 0.6 % Instant dry yeast
- ☐ 2 % Fine sea salt
- ☐ 2 % Rice flour or semolina (for dusting)
- ☐ 30 % Boiling water (for oven steam)

Let's make it.

01 The night before, build a poolish: stir together 100 g of the flour, 100 g of the water (room temperature), and a tiny pinch of the yeast — about 1/16 teaspoon — into a loose, batter-like paste. Cover and leave at cool room temperature for 12 to 16 hours. This slow pre-ferment builds the wheaty, faintly nutty flavor and the organic acids that give a real baguette its character, long before the main dough is mixed.

02 Add the remaining flour, the remaining water, and the rest of the yeast to the poolish and mix to a shaggy mass with no dry flour left. Rest it 20 to 30 minutes (an autolyse) so the flour fully hydrates and gluten begins forming on its own. Then sprinkle the salt over the top and squeeze and fold it in until fully incorporated. The dough will be wet and sticky at this high hydration — resist adding flour. Knead briefly or use slap-and-folds just until it comes together into a rough, cohesive ball.

03 Bulk-ferment the dough in a lightly oiled, covered container. Over the first 2 hours, give it three or four sets of stretch-and-folds spaced about 30 minutes apart: wet your hand, lift one side of the dough up and over itself, rotate the bowl, and repeat around all four sides. Each fold builds strength and traps gas. After the folds, let it rise undisturbed until nearly doubled and visibly airy — about 2 to 3 hours at room temperature total, or refrigerate overnight for deeper flavor.

04 Turn the dough onto a lightly floured surface and divide into three pieces of about 250 g each. Pre-shape each loosely into a rectangle and rest 15 to 20 minutes covered, so the gluten relaxes. To shape, gently flatten one piece into a rectangle, fold the top third down and seal, fold the bottom third up and seal, then roll and taper from the center outward into a slender 14-inch baton with pointed ends. Settle the loaves seam-side up in the folds of a heavily floured couche (use the rice flour to prevent sticking) and proof 45 to 75 minutes until puffy.

05 Preheat a baking stone or steel to 475°F (245°C) with an empty tray on the bottom rack. Transfer the proofed loaves seam-side down onto parchment. With a razor or lame held at a low 30-degree angle, make three or four long overlapping diagonal slashes down the length of each loaf — almost parallel, not crosswise. Slide the loaves onto the stone and immediately pour the boiling water into the hot bottom tray to flood the oven with steam, then close the door. Bake 12 minutes with steam, then remove the tray, vent any excess, and bake 8 to 12 minutes more until deep golden and crackling. Cool on a rack at least 20 minutes — the crumb is still setting.

Recipe & provenance ForkRecipe Kitchen / ForkRecipe / FoodML and contributors / CC BY-SA 4.0.
Original recipe and attribution CC BY-SA 4.0
Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
recipes.dvs-services.be / baguette