

## The Best Bread Ever: Country Baguettes

When mixing dough in the food processor, you want the ball to come together and not be crumbly, but you don't want it wet either. Depending on the type of flour you use, you may need to use less water, so be sure to hold back some water till you get an idea of what the right amount is.

Unbleached bread flour	3 1/3 cups
Fine sea salt	2 tsp
Instant yeast	1 tsp
Water	1 1/3 cups
Cornmeal for baking sheet	

Put flour, salt and yeast in food processor fitted with metal blade (sharp one). Slowly add water until the dough comes into a ball. Process it for 45 seconds. You should have one big ball with a couple smaller pieces of dough "chasing" it.

Stop the machine and take the temp of the dough, which should read between 75 and 80. If it's lower than that, process another 10 seconds, if hotter than that refrigerate for 5 to 10 minutes. When you touch the dough, it should feel springy, but not wet. If it sticks to your fingers, you might want to cut back the water by 1 or 2T next time you make it. But don't worry about it the first time. Just sprinkle it liberally with flour for the rise.

Remove dough and place in a large ungreased bowl. Cover the bowl with plastic (or use a tupperware type bowl with a lid) and allow to sit for 1 1/2 to 2 hours. Don't be concerned by how much it rises.

Turn dough onto a floured surface and divide into 3 or 4 equal pieces. Fold the pieces onto themselves into a short rectangular shape, more or less.

Line a cookie sheet with a floured towel and form channels for the baguettes to rise

When forming the loaves, don't attempt to deflate all the air bubbles. Using the heels and palm of your hands, flatten into a crude rectangle about 4 x 5 inches and 1 inch thick. Fold the long side farthest from you a little over 2/3 of the way toward you. Gently press the folded edge to seal the dough. Pick up and turn 180 degrees. Fold the other long edge about 2/3 and seal. Roll up from the sides and pinch along the seam to seal.

Roll the dough into a baguette shape by placing both hands on the center of the log and roll, using light pressure into a snake about 14 inches long. Wait to taper the ends until the loaf has reached the desired length. Transfer to a channel on the cookie sheet.

When all pieces are rolled, cover with plastic or a towel for 45 to 90 minutes until dough inc. by half its size (in hot, humid weather this might take less time).

One hour before baking, put the oven rack on the 2<sup>nd</sup> shelf from the bottom and preheat to 500 (use baking stones if you have them, and also put a pan on the bottom or bottom rack of the oven for water). Uncover loaves and transfer them to a cornmeal sprinkled baking sheet. Sprinkle the loaves with flour and slash them 3-4 times at a diagonal with a razor or sharp serrated bread knife.

Carefully pour about 1/2 cup of warm water into a pan on the bottom of the oven floor. Put the bread into the oven and reduce temp to 450. Continue baking for 10 minutes or until golden brown. Internal temp should be 205 degrees F. Let cool on a rack and cool completely before storing.

It is best not to store in plastic. Use paper bags for up to 2 days. Otherwise freeze in long ziplock freezer bags. They freeze beautifully!