

Ciabatta Bread

Learn to make authentic Italian ciabatta bread with this detailed recipe. Crispy crust, airy interior, perfect for sandwiches and paninis.

16h

PREP

40 min

COOK

16h 40min

TOTAL

8

SERVINGS

Medium

DIFFICULTY

Ingredients

- 3 cup flour
- 1 tsp yeast
- 1 cup water
- 2 tbsp olive oil

Instructions

- 1 Prepare the biga starter**

Combine 1 cup bread flour with 1/4 teaspoon active dry yeast in a medium bowl. Add 1/2 cup room temperature water and stir until it forms a thick, sticky paste with no dry flour visible.
- 2** Cover the bowl tightly with plastic wrap and let sit at room temperature for 12-24 hours until the mixture is bubbly, fragrant, and has roughly doubled in size.
- 3 Make the final dough**

In a large bowl, whisk together 2 cups bread flour, 3/4 teaspoon active dry yeast, and 1 teaspoon salt until evenly distributed.
- 4** Add 1/2 cup warm water (around 80°F/27°C) and all of the prepared biga to the flour mixture. Mix with your hands until no dry flour remains and the dough is very wet and sticky.
- 5 First bulk fermentation**

Drizzle 1/2 tablespoon olive oil over the dough and coat it completely. Cover with plastic wrap and let rest for 45 minutes at room temperature.

- 6 Oil your hands and perform a fold by gently stretching one side of the dough up and folding it over the center. Rotate the bowl 90 degrees and repeat 3 more times to complete one full set of folds.
- 7 Oil the dough surface again, cover, and rest for 45 minutes. Repeat the folding process twice more, resting 45 minutes between each fold, for a total bulk fermentation time of 3 hours.
- 8 **Shape and prepare for baking**

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper and dust generously with cornmeal. Dust your work surface heavily with cornmeal and turn out the dough.
- 9 Using a bench scraper, divide the dough into 3 equal portions. With oiled hands, gently stretch each piece into a rough rectangle about 8 inches long and 3 inches wide, handling as little as possible.
- 10 Transfer the shaped loaves to the prepared baking sheet, spacing them 2 inches apart. Cover with a damp kitchen towel and let rise for 1 hour until visibly puffed but not doubled.
- 11 **Preheat and bake**

Place one baking sheet on the middle oven rack and an empty metal skillet on the lower rack. Preheat oven to 450°F (230°C) for at least 30 minutes.
- 12 Carefully slide the parchment paper with loaves onto the preheated baking sheet. Immediately add 2 cups ice cubes to the hot skillet and quickly close the oven door to create steam.
- 13 Bake for 35-40 minutes until the loaves are deep golden brown and sound hollow when tapped on the bottom with your knuckles. Cool completely on a wire rack for at least 1 hour before slicing.

Tips

Oil your hands and work surfaces generously when handling the sticky ciabatta dough. This prevents sticking and makes the dough much easier to manage during folding and shaping.

Use a bench scraper or dough cutter to divide the wet dough rather than trying to tear it with your hands. This tool gives you better control and cleaner cuts.

Ensure your biga has properly fermented by checking for a slightly domed surface with bubble activity and a wine-like aroma. Under-fermented biga will result in less flavorful bread.

Don't skip the steam generation step - it's crucial for achieving ciabatta's characteristic crispy crust. Have your ice ready before opening the oven door to minimize heat loss.

Allow the bread to cool completely before slicing, at least 1-2 hours. Cutting too early will result in a gummy texture as the interior hasn't finished setting.

If your dough seems too wet to handle, resist adding extra flour. Instead, use more oil on your hands and surfaces, and trust that the folding process will develop the dough's structure.

Preheat your baking stone or sheet pan in the oven for at least 30 minutes before baking. This helps create better oven spring and a crispier bottom crust.

Test your yeast before starting by dissolving it in a small amount of warm water with a pinch of sugar. Active yeast should foam within 5-10 minutes.