

Julia Child's

French Bread Recipe

(Boules)

Ingredients

2 1/4 teaspoons (1 packet) instant yeast

1/3 cup warm water (for the yeast)

3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour

2 1/4 teaspoons salt

1 1/4 cups warm water (120° - 130°)



1. In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a dough hook, combine the yeast with the 1/3 cup of warm water. Stir with a spoon to dissolve the yeast.
2. Add the flour and salt to the bowl. Turn mixer on medium and mix until the dough just pulls together and all the flour is absorbed. If it is too dry, add a few drops of water, if too wet add more flour. Once the dough comes together, turn the mixer off and let the dough rest for 4-5 minutes.
3. Turn the mixer on and let the dough knead for about 7-8 minutes on medium-high speed. What you are trying to achieve is a dough that is soft and elastic with very little stickiness and springs back when you pull a little bit. Turn the mixer off and let rest for 2 minutes and knead again for a minute.
4. Place the dough into a large straight sided bowl and cover loosely with plastic wrap and a dish towel. Let it rise at room temperature (about 75°) until 3 1/2 times its original volume. This will probably take about 3-5 hours. Note: if you want to do this overnight, just mix the dough up, cover it and put it in the refrigerator and it will rise to 3 1/2 times its size in 9-12 hours.
5. Deflate the dough and scrape onto a floured work surface. Wash and dry the bowl. Pat the dough out with your hands, then, fold it into thirds like a letter and place back into the bowl. Cover the bowl again and let the dough rise at room temperature until not quite tripled in volume, about 1 1/2 - 2 hours.
6. Deflate and scrape again onto a floured work surface. Cut the dough in half and fold each in half. Cover with plastic and let rest for 5 minutes.
7. Meanwhile, prepare the rising surface: sprinkle flour onto canvas or linen towel placed on a baking sheet. I personally use a very clean pillow case, it is just the right size.
8. Take each piece, pick one edge up and fold it almost to the other edge and with the heel of your hand, push it away. Turn a quarter turn and do the same. Repeat about 12 times. This creates surface tension on the bread, making a nice smooth top. Then, turn the dough smooth side up and start rotating it between the palms of your hands, tucking a bit of the dough under as you rotate it. In a dozen turns you should have a smooth top with a pucker of dough on the bottom. Turn the dough over and pinch the pucker closed. Place pucker side up on the floured rising board and cover the boules loosely and let them rise at room temperature until almost triple in volume, about 1 1/2 - 2 1/2 hours.
9. Set up a "simulated baker's oven" by placing 6-9 red, square stone quarry or floor tiles (you can find these at Hardware or home improvement stores) on the oven rack. Then, about 30 minutes before baking, preheat oven to 450 degrees.
10. Invert the risen boules (pucker side down) onto a peel or bread board sprinkled with corn meal. Make one straight slash or a cross slash in the bread with a razor bread or really sharp knife.
11. Open the oven and with a quick jerk, slide the boules onto the tiles on the oven rack. Then, quickly throw about a cup of water onto the bottom of the oven. This creates steam and allows the bread to brown. Close the oven and do the same two more times after three minutes, then after 6 minutes.
12. All together bake for about 25-30 minutes. They are done when they feel light and you thump the bottom and it sounds hollow.
13. Allow to cool for about 2-3 hours and then serve or wrap tightly with plastic and foil and freeze.