

# BREADS FROM THE HEARTH: BAGUETTES AND CIABATTA

with Sue Gray & P.J. Hamel

## *What You'll Need*

### THE POOLISH (STARTER)

**1 1/4 cups** (5 1/4 oz.) King Arthur Unbleached All-Purpose Flour  
**2/3 cup** (5 1/4 oz.) cool (approximately 60°F) water  
**1/8 tsp.** instant yeast or **1/8 tsp.** active dry yeast dissolved in **1 tsp.** water

### BIGA (STARTER)

**1 1/2 cups** (6 3/8 oz.) King Arthur Unbleached All-Purpose Flour  
**1 cup** (8 oz.) water  
**1/4 tsp.** instant yeast or **1/4 tsp.** active dry yeast dissolved in **1 tsp.** warm water

### BAGUETTE DOUGH

**2 1/2 cups** (10 1/2 oz.) King Arthur Unbleached All-Purpose Flour  
**1 1/2 tsp.** instant yeast or **2 tsp.** active dry yeast dissolved in **1 tbsp.** water  
**2 tsp.** (3/8 ounce) salt  
All of the polish  
**2/3 cup** (5 1/4 oz.) cool (approximately 60°F) water

### CIABATTA DOUGH

Biga (from above)  
**1 tsp.** instant yeast or **1 1/2 tsp.** active dry yeast dissolved in **1 tbsp.** warm water  
**1 1/2 cups** (6 3/8 oz.) King Arthur Unbleached All-Purpose Flour  
**1 1/2 tsp.** salt  
**1 tsp.** sugar  
**1 tbsp.** nonfat dry milk  
**1/4–1/3 cup** (2– 3/4 oz.) water  
**2 tbsp.** (3/4 oz.) olive oil

## EVERY BREAD BAKER'S DREAM

The first goal of every budding artisan bread-baker is a crusty, flavorful baguette. Let this recipe be the starting point on a journey that may last for quite a long time—the “perfect” baguette is a serious challenge for the home baker. Just remember—the pleasure is in the journey, not the destination!

If you've never seen the term before, a polish is a pre-mixed “starter” of flour, water and a touch of yeast. Stirred together about 12–16 hours before the remainder of the dough, the organic acids and alcohol produced by the growing yeast do wonders for both the bread's taste and its texture. And the provenance of the word itself? Polish (pronounced pool-eesh, accent on the second syllable) is the French word for Polish, as in Poland, which is where the French believed this type of starter originated.

One last note: Notice the “symmetry” of the ingredient amounts: equal amounts of flour and water (by weight) in the polish, and in the dough, the same amount of water again, and double the amount of flour. This is the “classic” French formula for a baguette.

OK, let's begin.

## THE POOLISH (STARTER)

Combine the flour, water and yeast and mix just until blended in a medium-sized mixing bowl. Let the polish rise for 12 hours or so (overnight is usually just fine). It should dome slightly on top, and look aerated and just plain goopy. Try to catch it before it starts to fall, as it will be at its optimum flavor and vigor when it's at its highest point. On the other hand, don't make yourself crazy about this; we've used plenty of starters that are either pre- or post-prime, and they work just fine. When you first mix the polish, it'll look like a slack (wet) dough (left). Twelve to 16 hours later, the polish (right) will have expanded and become bubbly looking. It may remind you of pancake batter that's been on the griddle long enough so that the top is riddled with bubbles and holes (Figure 1.)



Figure 1

## MIXING THE DOUGH

Place the flour, yeast and salt in a mixing bowl, the bucket of your bread machine, the work bowl of a food processor, or the bowl of an electric mixer. Add the polish and water and mix the dough till it just becomes cohesive, about 30 seconds (it's OK if there's still flour in the bottom of the bowl). Let the dough rest, covered, for 20 minutes. This resting period allows the flour to absorb the liquid, which will make kneading much easier. (If you're using a bread machine, simply program it for dough, then cancel it once the ingredients are roughly mixed.)

## KNEADING THE DOUGH

Knead the dough, by whatever method you like, till it's cohesive and elastic, but not perfectly smooth; the surface should still exhibit some roughness. You'll want to knead this dough less than you think you should; while it'll shape itself into a ball, it won't have the characteristic "baby's bottom" smoothness of fully-kneaded dough. We estimate it takes about 7 minutes of kneading in a bread machine, 5 minutes in a mixer, or 1 minute in a food processor to achieve this cohesive-yet-rough texture. So, why aren't we kneading this dough "all the way?" Because we'll give it a nice, long rise, and during that rising time the gluten continues to develop. If you kneaded the dough fully before rising, the gluten would become unpleasantly stiff during the long rise.



*Note the roughness of the kneaded dough. Your goal is dough that's totally cohesive and somewhat elastic, but not "smooth as a baby's bottom."*

## LET THE DOUGH RISE

Transfer the dough to a lightly oiled bowl (or oil your mixer bowl, and leave it in there, or leave it in the bread machine, programmed for the dough cycle). Cover it, and let it rise for 2 hours, folding it over after the first hour (or more frequently, if the dough is very slack or wet; this folding helps strengthen the gluten). To fold dough, lift it out of the bowl, gently deflate it, fold it in half, and place it back in the bowl; this expels excess carbon dioxide, and also redistributes the yeast's food.



*When you fold the dough over midway through its rising period, you'll notice that already it's become much smoother. Ah, the magic of fermentation.*

## SHAPING THE LOAVES

After 2 hours or so, transfer the dough to a lightly oiled work surface. Divide it into three pieces, and gently pre-form them into rough logs. Let them rest for 20 minutes, then shape them into long (13- to 14-inch), thin baguettes, as follows.

Working with one piece of dough at a time, fold it in half lengthwise, and seal the fold, using your thumbs or the heel of your hand. Flatten the log somewhat, and repeat—fold it lengthwise, and seal. Turn the log over so the seam side is down, against the work surface, and gently roll the dough to lengthen it. If you push and pull too hard, it'll fight back; roll gently, and gradually it'll become longer. (If it does start to fight with you, let it rest for 5–10 minutes; this gives that elastic gluten a chance to relax.) Taper the ends of the loaf slightly. Repeat with the remaining two pieces of dough.

What's the point of this folding, sealing, and gentle rolling? It produces a loaf with even texture, as opposed to one that's fine-textured on one side, and coarse-textured on the other.



*Shaping each baguette is a multi-step process of folding the dough, sealing it, folding again, sealing again, then gently rolling.*

### LETTING THE LOAVES RISE

Let the baguettes rise, covered, in the folds of a linen or cotton couche until they're about 85% risen, 30–40 minutes. If you don't have a couche, place them in a perforated triple baguette pan, or on a lightly greased or parchment-lined baking sheet, and cover them lightly with an acrylic proof cover or greased plastic wrap. A linen couche covered by an acrylic proof cover is the ideal environment for a rising baguette. However, these undemanding loaves can also rise in a baguette pan or on a baking sheet, gently covered with lightly greased plastic wrap.



### SCORING THE LOAVES

Preheat your oven and baking stone to 500°F. If you don't have a baking stone, that's OK; baguettes baked on a stone will have a crispier crust, but those baked on a pan will be just as tasty, if not equally crunchy. Just before putting the loaves into the oven, use a lame or sharp serrated knife to gently make four diagonal cuts in each loaf. These cuts should angle into the dough at about a 45° angle (in other words, don't cut straight down,) and should be a good 1/4-inch deep. Be gentle, but quick; if you hesitate and drag your lame or knife through the dough, it'll stick rather than cut.

### CUT GENTLY..BUT DECISIVELY!

Make 3–4 diagonal cuts in the loaves, each cut beginning a bit above the end of the previous cut.



## BAKING THE BAGUETTES

Spray the loaves heavily with warm water; this will somewhat replicate a steam oven.\* Reduce the oven heat to 475°F and bake the loaves for 20 minutes or so. Remove the loaves from the oven when they're a deep, golden brown and transfer them to a wire rack to cool. Listen closely just as you take the loaves out of the oven; you'll hear them "sing," crackling as they hit the cool air of your kitchen. Let the loaves cool completely before slicing, if you can wait; if you can't wait, understand that the texture of the loaves where you cut them may be gummy, as they still contain moisture, which will be emitted as they cool. *Yield: 3 baguettes.*

\*Note: While spraying water into the oven, tossing ice cubes in a cast iron pan, spraying the loaves with water and other methods will give baguettes a rough approximation of the distinctive shiny, crackly crust produced in a steam-injected oven, the closest you'll come to these "professional" loaves at home is with a specially designed "steaming" bread pan. We sell such a pan in the Baker's Catalogue, the Steam Baking Master, and it really does work!

## TA-DA!

The finished baguettes will be a beautiful golden brown, and delightfully crisp-crunchy. They're best consumed the same day you make them. However, since you probably won't finish three baguettes at a sitting, here's how to deal with the leftovers. Place completely cool loaves in a perforated plastic baguette bag (you can often save these from supermarket loaves,) in a long paper bag, or in a plastic bag with the end left open. Before serving, wrap the loaves gently in aluminum foil, and reheat in a 350°F oven for 10–12 minutes, until they're heated through and crisp.



## YOU MADE IT!

So, how did the journey go? You may have hit some rough spots along the way, but take heart—each time you bake bread, you build on your experiences from the time before. Pretty soon, the whole process becomes second nature, and you develop your own shortcuts, work-arounds, and flexible approach.

We hope you enjoyed this lesson; take a peek at our ciabatta lesson, too. And, if you ever have any questions, please call us at 800.827.6836. The bakers here at King Arthur are always ready to lend a sympathetic ear, and a helping hand!

## THE VERY LIGHTEST CIABATTA

We love this recipe. It yields an extremely light, air pocket-riddled loaf, wonderful for dunking in soup or splitting lengthwise, to make a sandwich. Ciabatta literally means “slipper” in Italian, and the name refers to the shape of the bread—a flattened oval, kind of like a comfortable old bedroom slipper you just can’t bear to throw out. However, ciabatta has come to mean, at least in this country, any airy, dimpled loaf dusted with flour, of just about any shape. We like to remain true to the original spirit of the loaf, and shape it into a rough oval.

This bread begins with an overnight biga (starter), which improves both this simple loaf’s texture, and its taste. As the biga ferments, it creates certain acids that not only give the bread flavor, but affect the gluten, making the bread chewier. The use of a biga will also increase the loaf’s shelf life.

This is one dough that simply can’t be kneaded by hand; it’s just too sticky. An electric mixer, food processor, or bread machine will do the trick. During the winter you’ll need to use up to the greater amount of water in the range indicated below. In the dog days of August, when your flour’s been in a humid kitchen all summer, you’ll use the lesser amount. Your goal is a dough that’s very sticky, but holds its shape; when you scoop it out onto your work surface, it will settle into a flattened mound that is best approached with oiled hands and a bench knife or bowl scraper.

## MIXING THE BIGA

Mix the biga ingredients, in a small bowl or in the pan of your bread machine, until well combined (program the machine for Dough, then cancel it once the ingredients are mixed, after a couple of minutes.) Let the biga rest overnight, covered, or for up to 15 hours. It will expand and become bubbly.

## THE RISEN BIGA

The biga will be bubbly, sticky and very stretchy, as you can see in the photo.



## ELECTRIC MIXER METHOD

Place all of the dough ingredients into the bowl of your mixer, and beat at medium speed, using the flat beater, for 5–8 minutes. The dough will never completely clear the sides of the bowl, though it’ll begin to acquire some shape. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap, and allow the dough to rise for 1–1 1/2 hours; it will get very puffy. Midway through the rising period, gently deflate the dough and turn it over in the bowl; this will help it rise, and will also strengthen its gluten, making it easier to shape.

## BREAD MACHINE OR FOOD PROCESSOR METHOD

**Bread Machine Method** Place all of the ingredients into the pan of your bread machine, program the machine for Manual or Dough, and press Start. Examine the dough about 10 minutes before the end of the second kneading cycle; it should be very tacky, but should be holding its shape somewhat. Adjust the dough's consistency with additional flour or water, as necessary. Allow the machine to complete its cycle, giving the dough an additional 30 minutes in the bucket after the cycle is completed, if desired.

**Food Processor Method** Place all of the ingredients into the work bowl of your food processor, which you've equipped with its dough hook or whatever blade is appropriate for bread dough. Pulse the machine a few times to bring the ingredients together, then pulse, in 15-second increments, for 90 seconds; the dough should be very smooth, and also very wet and sticky. Transfer the dough to a lightly oiled bowl, cover the bowl, and allow the dough to rise for 1–1 1/2 hours.

**Using Either Method** Midway through the rising period, gently deflate the dough and turn it over in the bowl; this will help it rise, and will also strengthen its gluten, making it easier to shape.

## YOUR DOUGH WILL BE WET AND STICKY

Don't worry, this is how it's supposed to look. No matter how unmanageable it seems at this point, take heart; it'll gain some body as it rises, and become easier to work with. However, if the batter is so wet that it's easily pourable—like a thick pancake batter—add some more flour. When you “pour” it out of the bowl or bread pan, it should be a soft, viscous blob, not liquid-like.



## TURNING THE DOUGH

Turning the dough midway through its rising period helps redistribute the yeast's food, expels excess carbon dioxide and just generally helps it along.



## SHAPING THE DOUGH

Transfer the dough to a well-oiled work surface. Lightly grease a large cookie sheet, and your hands. Using a bench knife or your fingers, divide the dough in half. Handling the dough gently, stretch it into a log about 10-inches long, and place it on the baking sheet. Flatten the log with your fingers till it's about 10 inches long and 4–5 inches wide. Repeat with the remaining piece of dough.

### SHAPING THE DOUGH: STEP ONE

Yes, the dough is still quite sticky. But notice how much body it's gained during its first rise (**Figures 2 and 3.**) Keep oiling or wetting your fingers as you shape the dough. Push and pull it till it's about 10-inches long and 4–5 inches wide (**Figure 4.**)



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

## SECOND RISING

Lightly cover the dough with heavily oiled plastic wrap, and allow it to rise for 1 hour; it'll become quite puffy. Oil your fingers, and *gently* poke deep holes all over the dough. Re-oil the plastic wrap, re-cover the dough, and allow it to rise for an additional hour. At this point, the dough will be very puffy; it should jiggle like gelatin when you *very gently* shake it.

### DIMPLING THE CIABATTA

Midway through its final rise, “dimple” the ciabatta with your fingers. This will give the finished loaf its characteristic bumpy, “rustic” appearance.



### BAKING THE CIABATTA

Spray the loaves very heavily with water, and dust them lightly with flour (if desired). Bake them in a pre-heated 425°F oven for 25–30 minutes, or until they're golden brown. Turn off the oven, remove the ciabatta from the baking sheet, and return them to the oven, propping the oven door open a couple of inches with a folded-over potholder. Allow the ciabatta to cool completely in the oven; this will give them a very crisp crust. *Yield: 2 ciabatta.*

### LOVE THOSE HOLES!

Ciabatta's hallmark is its large, irregular holes, ideal for trapping a drizzle of olive oil.



## SO NOW WHAT?

Ciabatta is (of course) delectable eaten right out of the oven, drizzled with olive oil and sprinkled with freshly grated parmesan cheese, or served plain as a meal accompaniment. However, ciabatta also makes delightful garlic bread, or a sandwich. Read on...

## GARLIC BREAD

I'm sure we're all familiar with the typical white/squishy, butter-soaked type of garlic bread so prevalent in the '60s and '70s. In fact, I myself find it still a very tasty treat. But as the recipe's so simple, I decided to do here a new-wave garlic bread—still simple, but hopefully even more enjoyable. The bread is crustier, the garlic fresher and olive oil as well as butter plays a major role. Serve this with your favorite tomato-sauce-based pasta dish, and you'll understand again why garlic and tomatoes are just so right together. Ciabatta is the perfect loaf to transform into garlic bread.

### Garlic Topping

- 1 medium head garlic, cloves separated and peeled (*about 2 oz., about 15–20 cloves,*) finely minced\*
- 1/2 cup (*1 stick*) butter, melted
- 1/3 cup (*2 3/8 oz.*) olive oil
- Pinch of salt
- 4 oz. parmesan cheese, cut in chunks and grated (*1 cup grated*)\* parsley (if you like)

*\*A mini food processor is an invaluable tool for these tasks.*

**Assembling the Garlic Bread** Prepare the topping by combining the minced garlic cloves, melted butter, olive oil and a pinch of salt. Just before serving, cut the two loaves in half lengthwise, like you're going to make a couple of giant sandwiches. Spread the cut halves with the garlic mixture. Bake the four bread halves, cut sides up, in a preheated 400°F oven for about 10 minutes, or until the topping is bubbly and the edges of the bread are starting to brown. Remove the bread from the oven, and sprinkle it immediately with the grated parmesan and parsley, if desired. *Yield: about 24 servings.*

## PAN BAGNA

Pan Bagna—literally, “bathed bread”—is the Italian version of the Nicoise Pan Bagnat (wow, it's pretty easy to see *that* etymological connection!) an overstuffed tuna/vegetable sandwich. Use your favorite cold cuts and/or vegetables; the key is olive oil, which softens the bread just slightly and really brings out the flavors of all its disparate elements.

**Assembling the Pan Bagna** Split a ciabatta in half lengthwise, and brush each half with olive oil. Fill the ciabatta with Italian cold cuts, provolone cheese, chopped olives, softened sun-dried tomatoes, sliced red onions, lettuce, basil leaves, sliced peppers or pimientos, or any combination of any similar sandwich-type fillings.

**Letting it Season** Wrap the sandwich tightly in plastic wrap or aluminum foil, and top with a weighted baking sheet (a baking sheet with a couple of bricks or heavy cans on top). Let the pan bagna rest under the weights for a couple of hours (refrigerate it if it's very hot in the kitchen, or if you're worried about food safety,) then slice and serve. *Yield: about 4 servings.*

## THANKS FOR JOINING US

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