Baguettes

Make-ahead · Serves a crowd · Makes 3 baguettes

Ken's note: TBD

A reliable home baguette: a wet dough, folded rather than kneaded, and rested in the refrigerator overnight for flavor. Steam in the oven gives the crackly crust. The long rest means very little work on baking day.

Ingredients

- 1½ cups water, room temperature (plus up to 2 Tbsp more if the dough is very stiff)
- 1 tsp honey (optional)
- 1¼ tsp active dry yeast
- 4 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 tsp fine sea salt or kosher salt

Method

1. **The night before.** Warm ¼ cup of the water to about 105–110°F, stir in the honey, sprinkle on the yeast, and let stand 5–10 minutes, until foamy. Whisk the flour and salt together in a large bowl. Add the yeast mixture and the rest of the water and stir until no dry flour remains. The dough will be rough, soft, and sticky. Cover and rest 20–30 minutes.
2. With a wet hand, grab an edge of the dough, stretch it up, and fold it over the center; turn the bowl and repeat 4–6 times. Cover and rest 20 minutes, and repeat the folds twice more (three sets in all, about an hour). Cover tightly and refrigerate 8–24 hours (up to 48 hours for a tangier dough).
3. **Shape.** Turn the cold dough onto a floured counter and cut it into 3 pieces. Shape each into a loose ball, cover with a towel, and rest 30–40 minutes. Pat each piece into a rectangle, fold the near long edge to the middle and press, fold the far edge over it and press the seam to make a cylinder. Roll gently from the center out to a 12–15-inch log with slightly tapered ends. Set seam-side down in the ridges of a well-floured towel, or on a floured baguette tray, cover, and proof 40–60 minutes, until puffy and springy.
4. **Bake.** About 45 minutes before baking, put a baking stone or steel (or an upside-down heavy sheet pan) on the middle rack and a metal pan on the bottom rack. Heat the oven to 475°F and let it heat fully, at least 30 minutes.
5. Slash each loaf with 3–5 shallow diagonal cuts, using a razor or very sharp knife. Slide the loaves, on parchment, onto the hot stone. Pour about 1 cup of hot water into the bottom pan (stand back from the steam) and shut the door fast. Bake 15 minutes, crack the door for a moment to let the steam out, then lower the oven to 450°F and bake 10–15 minutes more, until deep golden brown. Cool on a rack at least 15 minutes before slicing.
6. Best the day it is baked. To bake later, refrigerate the shaped loaves, lightly covered, up to 24 hours, then let them stand about 1 hour at room temperature before scoring and baking.