

Baguettes

Ingredients – makes 3 baguettes

- 500g strong white bread flour
- 10g instant yeast
- 370ml cool water
- 10g salt
- Olive oil for kneading



Method

1. Lightly oil a 2-3 litre square plastic container.
2. Put the flour, salt and yeast into the bowl of a mixer fitted with a dough hook (don't put the salt directly on top of the yeast). Add $\frac{3}{4}$ of the water and begin mixing on a slow speed. As the dough starts to come together, slowly add the remaining water, then continue to mix on a medium speed for 5-7 minutes, until you have a glossy, elastic dough.
3. Tip the dough into the prepared tub. Cover with a tea towel and leave until at least doubled in size – about 1 hour.
4. Coat the work surface with a little olive oil, then carefully tip the dough onto it. Rather than knocking it back, handle it gently so you keep as much air in the dough as possible. This helps to create the irregular airy texture of a really good baguette. The dough will be wet to the touch but still lively.
5. Divide the dough into 3 pieces. Shape each piece into an oblong by flattening the dough out slightly and sliding the sides into the middle. Then roll each up into a sausage – the top should be smooth with a join running along the length of the base.
6. Now, beginning in the middle, roll out each sausage with your hands. Don't force it out by pressing heavily. Concentrate on the backwards and forwards movement and gently use the weight of your arms to roll out the dough to the length of the tray.
7. Place the baguettes into the tray and then place them inside a clean plastic bag and leave to prove for about 1 hour, until the dough is at least doubled in size and springs back quickly if you prod it lightly with your finger. Meanwhile, heat the oven to 220°C (Fan 200°C) and put a roasting tray in the bottom to heat up.
8. When the baguettes are risen and light, dust them lightly with flour then slash each one 3 times along its length on the diagonal, using a razor blade or very sharp knife. Fill the roasting tin with hot water to create steam and put the bread into the oven.
9. Bake for 25 minutes, or until the baguettes are golden brown and have a slight sheen. Cool on a wire rack.

Notes

To create garlic bread, break 3 garlic bulbs into cloves and peel them. Place them in a roasting dish and sprinkle with a little salt, olive oil and sugar. Roast for 20 minutes at 200°C (Fan 180°C) until golden brown and soft to the touch. Leave them to cool. Add them to the dough at the end of stage 2, above.