



Classic Baguettes

These crunchy baguettes feature a chewy interior riddled with holes, and a crisp, deep-golden crust. While it's a challenge to make "real" baguettes at home, this version is probably as close to an artisan bakery version as you're going to find. The ingredients in baguettes are pure simplicity: flour, water, salt, and yeast. It's the baker's technique that turns an average baguette into an all-star. Don't expect perfection the first time out, but the more you practice your baguette-baking techniques, the better the baguette you'll make.

Starter (poolish)

½ cup (113g) cool water

¼ teaspoon active dry yeast or instant yeast*

1 cup (120g) King Arthur Unbleached All-Purpose Flour

*Substitute 1 tablespoon (25g) healthy sourdough starter (fed or unfed) for the yeast, if desired.

Dough

1 ½ teaspoons active dry yeast or instant yeast

1 cup + 2 tablespoons (255g) lukewarm water

all of the starter

3 ½ cups (418g) King Arthur Unbleached All-Purpose Flour

2 teaspoons (12g) salt

For the starter: Mix everything together to make a soft dough. Cover and let rest at room temperature for about 14 hours. The starter will be bubbly and expanded.

For the dough: Mix and knead everything together — by hand, mixer or bread machine set on the dough cycle — to make a soft, somewhat smooth dough; it should be cohesive, but the surface may still be a bit rough. If you're using a stand mixer, knead for about 4 minutes on medium-low speed. The kneaded dough should be a bit sticky.

Place the dough in a lightly greased bowl, cover and let the dough rest for 45 minutes. Gently grab the dough's edges and tuck them into the center, then turn it over before recovering and letting it rise for an additional 45 minutes, until it's noticeably puffy.

Turn the dough out onto a lightly greased work surface and divide it in thirds. Round each piece into a ball. Cover with greased plastic wrap and let rest for 15 minutes to 1 hour.

To shape: Flatten a piece of dough slightly then fold it nearly (but not quite) in half, sealing the edges with the heel of your hand. Turn the dough around, and repeat: fold, then flatten. Repeat one more time; the dough should have started to elongate itself.

With the seam side down, cup your fingers and gently roll the dough into a 16" log. Your goal is a 15" baguette, so 16" allows for the slight shrinkage you'll see once you're done rolling. Taper each end of the log slightly to create the baguette's typical "pointy" end.

(continued on back)



Place the logs seam-side down into the folds of a heavily floured couche. Cover with greased plastic wrap and allow the loaves to rise until they're slightly puffy (they'll be soft to the touch but won't double). This should take about 45 minutes to an hour at room temperature (about 68°F).

Towards the end of the rising time, preheat your oven to 450°F with a cast iron pan on the floor or lowest rack of the oven. If you have been using a baking stone, place it on a middle rack. Heat 1 ½ cups water to boiling.

Gently roll the risen baguettes from the couche onto the Baguette Transfer Peel, so the seam is down.

Using a baker's lame, make five angled slashes in each baguette, then slide them from the peel to the baking stone. Repeat with the other baguettes.

Carefully pour the boiling water into the cast iron pan, and quickly shut the oven door. Bake for 24 to 28 minutes, or until the baguettes are a very deep golden brown. Remove from the oven and cool on a rack.

Store any leftover baguettes in a paper bag overnight; freeze for longer storage. Thaw and reheat just before serving.

Yield: 3 baguettes.

