

From the book: "Bread Alone" by Daniel Leader, 1993 William Morrow and Co, Inc.

CLASSIC BAGUETTE

Allow 24 hours to ferment the poolish,
Total preparation and baking time (not including the poolish):
6 hours, 45 minutes

This is the long and slender classic French loaf with a light and airy crumb, and a golden crunchy crust. It's best warm from the oven and is delicious by itself with butter for a snack, or as a complement to soups, stews, or other meal. A good *baguette* will stale quickly since the proportion of crust to crumb is 50-50. So bake it and eat it, or freeze it, but don't plan on it for the next day.

Makes 4 baguettes 12 to 14 inches long, 1 inch wide

POOLISH

Spring water (75°F.)	1 cup	8 fluid ounces
Moist yeast	1/2 teaspoon	1/8 ounce
or dry yeast	1/4 teaspoon	1/16 ounce
Organic all-purpose white flour*	1 1/2 cups	8 ounces

FINAL DOUGH

Spring water	1 cup	8 fluid ounces
Moist yeast	1/2 teaspoon	1/8 ounce
or dry yeast	1/4 teaspoon	1/16 Ounce
Organic all-purpose white flour*	4 1/4-5 1/4 cups	21-26 ounces
Fine Sea Salt	1 tablespoon	3/4 Ounce

See Flours (pages 42-49). These are good approximate measures. You may use more or less depending on the weight and absorbency of your flours-

MAKE AND FERMENT THE POOLISH (allow 24 hours)

Combine the water and yeast in a medium bowl. Let stand 1 minute, then stir with a wooden spoon until yeast is dissolved. Add the flour, and stir until the consistency of a thick batter. Continue stirring for about 100 strokes or until the strands of gluten come off the spoon when you press the back of the spoon against the bowl. Scrape down the sides of the bowl with rubber spatula, Cover with a clean damp towel or plastic wrap, and put in a moderately warm (74F-80F.) draft-free place until it doubles in volume.

MIX AND KNEAD THE FINAL DOUGH (20 minutes)

Measure the ingredients and calculate the necessary temperatures (see page 58) Measure and transfer 1 cup (9 ounces) of the *poolish* to a 6-quart bowl- (Discard remaining poolish.) Add THE water and yeast. Break up the poolish, well with a spoon and stir until it loosens and the mixture foams slightly. Add 1 cup (5, ounces) of the flour and stir until well combined. Add the salt and only enough of the remaining flour to make a thick mass that is difficult to stir. Turn out onto a well-floured surface. Knead, adding more of the remaining flour when needed, until dough is soft and smooth, 15 to 17 minutes- (Or make in a heavy-duty mixer; see page 67.) The dough is ready when a small amount pulled from the mass springs back quickly (see Kneading, page 66).

FERMENT THE DOUGH (2 to 3 hours)

Shape the dough into a ball and let it rest on a lightly floured surface you scrape, clean, and lightly oil the large bowl. Place the dough in the *bowl* and turn the dough to coat the top with oil. Take the dough's temperature: the ideal is 78F. (See page 58). Cover *with* a clean damp towel or plastic wrap and put in a moderately warm (74-80F.) draft free place until doubled in volume, and a slight indentation remains after pressing a finger into the dough.

Note: If the dough temperature is higher than 78F, put it in a cooler than 78F. place like the refrigerator. until the dough cools to 78F. If it is lower than 78F., put it in a warmer than 78F., place until the dough, warms to 78F. The point is to try to keep the dough at 78F. during its fermentation. If you do have to move the dough, be gentle and don't jostle it, or the dough may deflate

DIVIDE THE DOUGH AND REST(35 minutes)

Deflate the dough pushing down in the center and pulling up on the sides. Transfer the dough to a lightly floured board. Knead briefly. Divide into 4 equal portions. Flatten with the bed of your hand and shape each into a tight ball. Cover with a clean damp cloth.

SHAPE THE DOUGH INTO LOAVES (10 minutes)

Flatten each ball with the heel of your hand on an un-floured board into a disk about 1 inch thick. Fold the top third down and seal with the heel of your hand. Fold from the top a second time and seal firmly. Fold lengthwise again and seal firmly. Shape each into a 14-inch loaf starting at the center and moving your hands outward, elongate it as you gently roll and stretch the dough until the log has become as long and as narrow as you wish. Place seam side up in a floured *couche* or pan for final proofing.

PROOF THE LOAVES (1½ hours)

Place the loaves seam side up in a well-floured *couche* (see Equipment, page 52). Cover with a clean damp towel or plastic wrap and put in a moderately warm (74--80F.) draft-free place until increased in volume about 1 ½ times, or until a slight indentation remains when the dough is pressed with a fingertip.

Using a very sharp, serrated knife or a single-edged razor blade, score the 2 loaves by making quick shallow cuts 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep along the surface.

BAKE THE LOAVES (20 to 25 minutes)

Forty-five minutes to 1 hour before baking, preheat the oven and homemade hearth or baking stone on the center rack of the oven (see Equipment, page 52) to 450F

The oven rack must be in the center of the oven. If it is in the lower third of the oven, the bottoms of the breads may burn, and if it is in the upper third, the top crusts may burn.

Using the *couche* as an aid, gently roll one loaf from the *couche* onto a lightly floured peel so that it sits seam side down. Repeat with a second loaf. Using the peel, slide the loaves onto the hearth. Quickly repeat the process with the next 2 loaves. If using a pan to bake on, slide pan into oven's lower third.

Spray the inner walls and floor of the oven with cold water from a spritzer bottle. If there's an electric light bulb in the oven, avoid spraying it directly, it may burst. Spray for several seconds until steam has filled the oven. Quickly close the door to trap the steam and bake 3 minutes. Spray again in the same way, closing the door immediately so that steam doesn't escape and bake until loaves are a rich caramel color and the crusts are firm, 15 to 20 minutes. To test the loaves for doneness, remove and hold the loaves upside down. Strike the bottoms firmly with your finger. If the sound is hollow, the breads are done. If it doesn't sound hollow, bake 5 minutes longer. Cool 5 minutes,

Note: It is not necessary to cool baguettes completely. In fact, they are best eaten warm.