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The world of baking according to
SILVIA COLLOCA

MY EASY 'BAGUETTE'

Technically speaking, this is not the traditional method for a French baguette, which requires a pre-fermented starter and several other stages. This is my simplified version for the home baker, and I can assure you the result is a very close cousin of the delectable French creation. No one has to know you skipped a few steps!

1 quantity of 'stretch and fold' dough
(see page 22)

semolina and extra flour, for dusting

ice cubes and water

VEGAN

Make the dough as instructed. Remove from the fridge after proving overnight, rest at room temperature for 30 minutes, then stretch into a rectangle. Roll the dough up from a long edge into a sausage. Taper the ends, dust with semolina and extra flour, then cover with a damp tea towel and prove at room temperature for 1–1½ hours. (You can divide the dough in half and shape it into two smaller baguettes if you like.)

Preheat your oven to 220°C. Place an empty metal bowl on the lower shelf of your oven to heat up. Line a baking tray with baking paper.

Once the bread has risen, place it on the prepared tray, score the top four or five times 5 cm apart with a sharp knife or razor. Spray the top with water mist, then place the tray in the oven and fill the empty metal bowl with iced water to create steam. Bake for 40–45 minutes or until the baguette is golden brown and the bottom sounds hollow when tapped. Remove from the tray and cool on a wire rack for 1 hour before slicing.

MAKES 1 LARGE OR 2 SMALL BAGUETTES



‘STRETCH AND FOLD’ DOUGH, FOUR WAYS

This sensational dough also requires no kneading as such, making the prospect of baking your own bread acceptable to most beginners. The only extra work needed is to stretch it into a rectangle and fold it onto itself a few times during the proving time – a little effort that will ensure a better texture for your bread. For this type of bread I also like to introduce a bit of steam in the oven, by heating up a metal bowl and then filling it with iced water as you put the bread into the oven. Steam will ensure the crust doesn't dry out as it bakes and the crumb will bake evenly to soft perfection. You'll need to start this recipe one day in advance.

‘STRETCH AND FOLD’ DOUGH

½ teaspoon dried yeast

1 teaspoon barley or rice malt syrup,
or honey

300 ml lukewarm water

450 g (3 cups) baker's flour

3 teaspoons salt

VEGAN (IF NOT USING HONEY)

Mix the yeast, syrup or honey and water in a bowl and stand for a few minutes to froth up.

Place the flour in a large bowl. Pour in the water mixture and mix until a dough forms. Add the salt and knead lightly to incorporate. Don't worry if the dough doesn't look smooth at this stage – the slow fermentation and the folding will take care of that.

Cover the bowl with a damp tea towel and rest at room temperature for 1 hour. After this time, the dough will feel softer and more relaxed.

Using floured hands, stretch the dough into a rectangle, then fold the top and bottom thirds into the centre, like folding a letter, and tuck the ends under to form a ball. Cover with a damp tea towel and prove at room temperature for 3–4 hours. Repeat the stretching and folding, then cover and leave to prove at room temperature for 2–3 hours, before resting overnight in the fridge. Resting the dough in the fridge overnight (or for up to four days) will add both flavour and texture to your bread, and will also make it easier to digest.

The next day, take the dough out of the fridge. Rest it at room temperature for 30 minutes, then stretch and fold one last time.

The dough is now ready to be shaped and baked into your favourite bread.

