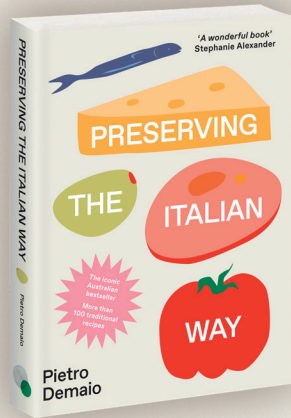


PRESERVING THE ITALIAN WAY

Pietro Demaio

Sourdough ciabatta

Ciabatta casalinga



The basic fact about all home preserving is that it needs to be simple and use as few ingredients as possible. My mother did not have elaborate equipment or a long list of added ingredients when she made her bread. This is a modern take on her recipe that I now like to use.

The actual time spent preparing this bread is less than 15 minutes, then it's just a matter of setting it aside to ferment and prove. The longer you leave the *biga* (starter) in the fridge, the more of a pronounced sourdough flavour you will achieve.

500 g bread flour, plus extra for dusting
½ teaspoon dried yeast
1 tablespoon table salt
1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

To make the *biga* (starter), combine 200 g of the flour, the yeast and 200 ml of water in a large bowl, then place in the fridge for 12–24 hours.

Remove the *biga* from the fridge, then add the remaining 300 g of flour, the salt, olive oil and 160 ml of water. Mix well, cover with a tea towel and set aside to prove in a warm spot for 3 hours. Every 45 minutes, turn the dough over from four even points around the bowl, then cover and return to the warm spot. You will do this four times.

Preheat the oven to 240°C fan-forced. As soon as you turn the oven on, fill a tray with water and place it in the base of the oven (this will heat up and create steam when cooking the bread; essential for a lovely crusty loaf!). Line another baking tray with baking paper and dust liberally with flour.

Gently turn out the dough onto the prepared tray, being very careful not to knock the air out of it. Flour the dough liberally, cut it into two pieces, then very gently shape these into loaves. Allow the dough to rise for another 35 minutes while the oven heats to 240°C.

When the dough is risen and the oven fully heated, slide the tray of bread into the oven. You will get a blast of steam when you open the oven door – this is what you want!

Cook the bread for 12 minutes, then rotate the tray and cook for a further 12 minutes.

Allow to cool on a wire rack, then eat with a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil, some *Melanzane Sott'olio* (see page 29) or fresh butter and homemade jam.

