

BIGA BREAD

[Reproduced courtesy of JHR, aka The Warlock]

This recipe by the kindness of Deborah Mele, [Bella Online's](#) Italian Food Host.

This is my method of making good, crusty Italian bread. Once you know how, you can do lots of things with this dough. I start with a biga or starter the day before, and leave it sit in the fridge overnight, and complete the bread the next day. I don't knead my bread as much as the traditional recipes call for, but I get great results. Even if you've never made bread before, you'll find this recipe easy.

Ingredients:

Biga:

- ½ Ts. Active Dry Yeast
- 1 Cup Lukewarm water
- 2 Cups Unbleached, All-purpose Flour

Instructions:

Mix the yeast and water together, and then slowly start adding the flour, mixing well. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit at room temperature for up to 6 hours. Refrigerate overnight.

Bread Ingredients:

- 2 Cups Warm Water (about 90 degrees F.)
- 1 Pkg. Active Dry Yeast
- 5-6 Cups All-purpose, Unbleached Flour
- 2 Ts. Salt

Instructions:

Place the water in a large bowl, sprinkle the yeast overtop and mix well. Let sit 10 minutes until bubbly. Add the biga, flour, and salt and stir with a wooden spoon (or mix with your hands) until everything is mixed. The dough will be fairly wet and sticky at this point. Cover and let stand in a warm spot for about 1 to 1 ½ hours until doubled in volume. Punch down the dough, folding it over on itself two or three times, cover and let rise once more until doubled, about 1 hour. If you choose, you could refrigerate your dough at this time and leave it overnight to prepare the next day.

Turn out your dough onto a floured baking sheet, and without overworking it too much shape into one large or two smaller round or oval shaped loaves, using as much extra flour as needed to keep it from sticking. Slash across the tops of the loaves with a serrated knife or razor just prior to baking.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. and place a casserole dish with boiling water on the lower oven rack. Bake your bread 30 minutes, turn the baking sheet around, and reduce the heat to 300 degrees and bake for another 30-45 minutes. At this point your bread should be golden brown and should sound hollow when you tap the bottom. Allow the bread to cool to room temperature and serve.

Baking Tip: You could also use a baguette pan to make long thin loaves, or spread your dough across a well-oiled cookie sheet to make focaccia.

Variations:

Rosemary Bread-Add 4 Tbs. finely chopped rosemary to the flour. Brush the loaves with water and sprinkle with coarse sea salt just prior to baking.

Olive Bread-Add 12 oz. flavorful pitted olives, coarsely chopped to the flour mixture.

Recommended Bread Baking Cookbook:

No Need To Knead, By Suzanne Dunaway

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