

Sourdough Baguettes

<http://userealbutter.com/2018/04/23/sourdough-baguettes-recipe/>
based on [this recipe](#) and [this technique](#), and some futzing around

This recipe makes two 16-inch baguettes or three 11-inch baguettes

levain

1/2 tbsp (8g) active sourdough starter
38g (1/4 cup) bread flour
38g (1/6 cup) water

dough

265g (9 oz.) water, room temperature, divided into 235g and 30g OR 8 oz. and 1 oz.
315g (scant 2 1/2 cups) bread flour*
35g (1/4 cup + 1 1/4 tsps) whole wheat flour*
1 1/2 tsps salt

*If you want all bread flour, then use 2 3/4 cups bread flour and omit the wheat flour. If you want more wheat flour, decrease the amount of bread flour by the amount of wheat flour you add.

Prepare your sourdough starter: If your starter has been in the refrigerator, let it warm up on the counter for an hour or two. Feed your starter daily for 2-3 days. It should be active and full of bubbles when you are ready to make your levain.

Make the levain: Mix the starter, flour, and water together making sure not to leave any dry pockets of flour. Cover and let sit on the counter overnight (~12 hours).

Prepare the dough: The levain is ready when it is bubbly and a little pea-sized dollop floats in water. Mix the levain and 1 cup (8 oz. or 235 ml) of water together in a large bowl until the levain is mostly dissolved. Stir in both flours to form a shaggy dough. Cover the bowl (I use plastic wrap because it is so arid here) and let the flour hydrate for 30 minutes to 4 hours (I do 4 hours). Mix the salt into the remaining 1 ounce (30 ml) of water and stir until all or most of the salt has dissolved. Pour the salt water over the rested dough and mix it in by hand, pinching and squeezing the dough until the liquid is completely incorporated and the dough is sticky.

Turn the dough: Facing your dough, grab the edge of the dough farthest from you, pull it up and toward you and tuck it down over the edge of the dough closest to you. Rotate your bowl 90 degrees (clockwise or counterclockwise is fine, just be consistent throughout) and repeat. Continue to do this until you return to your starting point (or have folded the dough 4 times). That is one turn. Let the dough rest covered for 30 minutes. Repeat for a total of 6 turns. After the the 6th turn, allow the dough to rest for 30-60 minutes (I rest for 60 minutes). The dough should be larger, but it won't be doubled in size. As you turn and rest the dough, it should also become more cohesive and elastic and smooth.

Shape the dough: Turn the dough out onto a floured work surface. Using a pastry scraper, cut the dough in half (for 16-inch baguettes) or in thirds (about 11-inch baguettes) depending on the length of your pizza stone/pan cover or diameter of your Dutch oven. Sprinkle flour over the dough if it is sticky. Work the dough pieces one at a time. Flatten the dough out into a rectangle so that a long edge is closest to you. Grab the two corners nearest you and dog-ear them an inch or two toward the center of the rectangle. Begin rolling the edge closest to you toward the center. When you have rolled to the center, use your fingers to grab the outer sides and tuck them toward the center by an inch or two. Continue rolling the dough into a little log. Tidy the edges by tucking them under the log. Repeat for the remaining dough pieces. Let them rest for 20-30 minutes under plastic wrap.

While the dough rests, rub a generous amount of flour into a couche or a clean kitchen towel that is longer than your intended baguettes. Make sure the flour gets into the weave. I fold my couche so that it fits on a half sheet (17-inches long).

When the dough logs are rested, begin shaping each one. Take a piece of dough and flatten it on your lightly floured work surface, pressing out any large air bubbles. The long edge should be closest to you. Fold the bottom edge up to the longitudinal center line of the dough and press or pinch it down to seal it in place. I do this working from left to right. Now turn the dough 180° so that you can fold the other edge up to the longitudinal center line and seal it in place (the dough sticks to itself more easily if it isn't too heavily floured). Now fold the dough in half with the center line acting as the crease. As you fold the top half down onto the bottom half with one hand (in my case, the right hand) use the other hand to press/seal the halves together and deflate any large air bubbles. Once the dough has been completely folded and sealed, gently roll the dough back and forth, working from the center to the edges to form a long log. The final length should be your target length for your baguette. Set your baguette dough on your couche or floured kitchen towel and form two ridges on either side of the dough with the floured fabric. Repeat for the remaining dough pieces, setting your finished baguette doughs next to ridge of the most recent baguette dough, and forming another ridge on the other side of the most recent dough.

Proof the dough: Place the baking sheet in a large plastic bag (I use an XL ziploc bag) and seal or tie off the bag. Set the ensemble in the refrigerator for a cold proof overnight or up to 24 hours. You could also do a room temperature rise for 3-4 hours, but I haven't had good success with final shapes doing it that way.

Bake: If using a Dutch oven, place the Dutch oven with lid in your oven on the middle rack and preheat to 500°F. Get a sheet of parchment paper out that is as long as the baguette. When the oven has been at target temperature for 10 minutes or more, remove the dough from the refrigerator. Set the first baguette on the parchment (I do one at a time for the most even and consistent bake) and return the rest to the refrigerator. Score the baguette with a lame or a knife with three nearly vertical slashes down the center along the length of the dough. Spray the dough with water using a spray bottle (3 or 4 sprays should be fine). Using oven mitts, remove the Dutch oven from the oven (close the door). Quickly remove the lid, lower the parchment paper with the baguette dough into the center of the Dutch oven. Close the lid on the Dutch oven. Return to the oven. Bake 10 minutes. Reduce oven to 450°F. Bake 5 minutes. Remove the lid of the Dutch oven (at this point, I remove the parchment and place a heatproof steam rack under the bread in the Dutch oven to prevent scorching) and continue to bake for 15 minutes or until the crust is golden. Remove from oven and cool on a cooling rack. Repeat for remaining baguettes.

If using a roasting pan and pizza stone, set your stone on the middle or next lower rack of the oven (middle rack doesn't leave enough room for me to lift the roasting pan lid), place the roasting pan lid on top, and preheat the oven to 500°F. Place a sheet of parchment paper that is at least as long as your baguette dough on a pizza peel or the back of a baking sheet. When the oven has been at target temperature for 10 minutes or more, remove the dough from the refrigerator. Set the first baguette on the parchment (I do one at a time for the most even and consistent bake) and return the rest to the refrigerator. Score the baguette with a lame or a knife with three nearly vertical slashes down the center along the length of the dough. Spray the dough with water using a spray bottle (3 or 4 sprays should be fine). Using oven mitts, remove the lid from the pizza stone, slide the parchment paper with the dough onto the stone, cover the dough with the lid. Bake 10 minutes. Reduce oven to 450°F. Bake 5 minutes. Remove the roasting pan lid from the oven, spray the bread with 3-4 sprays of water and continue to bake for 7 minutes. Rotate the bread 180° (for even browning) and spray 3-4 more times. Bake until the crust is golden. Remove from oven and cool on a cooling rack. Repeat for remaining baguettes.

Makes 2-3 baguettes.