How to Bake a Rustic No-Knead Loaf in a Dutch Oven

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Bake your first crackling-crusted artisan loaf with four weighed ingredients, a long overnight ferment, folds instead of kneading, and a preheated Dutch oven.

Things you will need

- Digital kitchen scale readable to 1 gram
- 24-28 cm cast-iron Dutch oven with lid
- Roll of parchment paper
- Stainless bench scraper
- Dough whisk or sturdy wooden spoon
- 4-litre mixing bowl
- Bread flour, 12-13 percent protein
- Instant dry yeast in a sealed jar
- Fine sea salt
- White rice flour for dusting
- Round banneton or cotton-lined bowl
- Lame or single-edge razor blade
- Instant-read thermometer
- Dry full-length oven mitts

Phase 1: Gear and Weights Before Anything Else

1. **Assemble Five Pieces of Core Gear**
   You need exactly five things: a digital kitchen scale that reads to 1 g, a 24-28 cm cast-iron Dutch oven with a lid, a roll of parchment, a metal bench scraper, and a dough whisk or sturdy wooden spoon.
2. **Weigh the Four Ingredients in Grams**
   Weigh 500 g bread flour, 400 g water at about 21 C, 10 g fine salt, and 1 g instant yeast, and put each into its own vessel rather than estimating.
3. **Check the Pot Is Rated for Heat**
   Flip the Dutch oven over and look for the maker's mark; enameled and bare-cast-iron pots usually tolerate 260 C/500 F, but knobs with plastic or rubber washers can fail at far less.
4. **Cut a Parchment Sling That Fits the Pot**
   Tear off about 60 cm of parchment and crease it into a square that just covers the base of your pot, then lift it out and back in a few times so the paper goes soft and remembers the shape.
5. **Pick a Ferment Spot and a Bake Slot**
   The ferment runs 12 to 18 hours at 20-23 C, so choose one counter away from a sunny window, a dishwasher vent, or a radiator before you mix.

Phase 2: Mix and Judge the Overnight Ferment

6. **Whisk Dry Goods Before Adding Water**
   Put the 500 g of flour, 10 g of salt and 1 g of instant yeast in a 4-litre bowl and whisk for 30 to 45

seconds with the dough whisk so the yeast disperses evenly through the whole mass.

7. **Stir in Water to a Shaggy Mass**

   Pour in all 400 g of water and stir with the whisk or a wooden spoon for 60 to 90 seconds until no dry flour remains and the mass looks rough, wet and completely unpromising.

8. **Cover and Leave It 12 to 18 Hours**

   Seal the bowl with a plate, damp towel, or cling film and leave it undisturbed on your chosen counter for 12 to 18 hours.

9. **Fold the Dough Four Times**

   Instead of kneading, wet one hand, reach down the side of the bowl, lift a quarter of the dough, stretch it, and fold it over the centre, then rotate the bowl and repeat for all four quarters.

10. **Judge the Rise by Bubbles and Jiggle**

    Bulk fermentation is finished when the dough has grown to roughly 1.5 to 2 times its volume, shows bubbles of several sizes at the surface and along the sides, and wobbles like soft jelly when you nudge the bowl.

Phase 3: Shape, Proof and Preheat the Pot

11. **Turn the Dough Out and Pre-Shape It**

    Scrape the fermented dough onto a well-floured surface in one piece using the bench scraper, taking your time so the gas you spent 14 hours making stays inside; do not punch it down, and let it settle uncovered for 2 or 3 minutes.

12. **Shape for Tension, Not Degassing**

    Flip the rested round seam-side up, pat it into a rough square only with your fingertips, then fold the far third down and press, fold the near third up over it, and roll the whole thing toward you into a tight cylinder.

13. **Proof in a Basket Dusted With Rice Flour**

    Coat a 20-25 cm round banneton, or a bowl lined with a clean cotton tea towel, generously with rice flour, then place the shaped loaf seam-side up for a round loaf so the seam flattens against the basket wall.

14. **Retard the Loaf for Flavor and Timing**

    If you cannot bake the moment the loaf is proofed, slide the basket into a plastic bag and put it in the refrigerator for 12 to 24 hours; cold slows the yeast but leaves bacterial and enzyme activity running, which deepens flavour and produces the blisters on the crust that professional bakeries sell.

15. **Preheat the Pot a Full Hour**

    Put the empty Dutch oven with its lid on in a cold oven, set it to 240 C/465 F, and give it a full 60 minutes after the oven signals it has reached temperature.

Phase 4: Score, Bake, Cool and Diagnose

16. **Score the Loaf Deeply and Safely**

    Turn the proofed loaf out onto the parchment sling seam-side down, then make one decisive cut about 1 cm deep across the top with a lame or a fresh razor held at a shallow angle rather than stabbed straight down.

17. **Bake Covered 30 Then Uncovered 15**

    Lift the sling with both hands, lower the loaf into the hot pot, and put the lid on immediately; the 2 to

3 seconds you spend hesitating are heat and steam escaping.

18. Test for Doneness Before You Commit

Slide the loaf out onto a rack and check two things.

19. Cool an Hour, Then Store and Reheat

Leave the loaf on a wire rack for at least 60 minutes before the first slice, and this is the step beginners break most.

20. Diagnose Dense, Gummy, Pale or Flat Loaves

Read failures by cause rather than starting over blindly.

Sources

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Written as a checklist from https://www.howcompass.com/how-to/Bake-a-Rustic-No-Knead-Loaf. Corrections: https://www.howcompass.com/co