How to Shape and Bake Three Artisan Loaves at Home

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Mix one lean master dough at 70 percent hydration and shape it into a boule, a batard, and a long loaf, learning three techniques from a single batch.

Things you will need

- Digital kitchen scale readable to 1 gram
- Bread flour at 12-13 percent protein
- Fine sea salt and instant dry yeast
- Ripe levain or a jar to start one
- Stainless bench scraper with a sharp edge
- Wide mixing bowl and a linen cover
- Round proofing basket, about 8 inches
- Linen-lined oval basket or a proving couche
- Rice flour for dusting the baskets
- Baking stone or half-inch steel plate
- Wooden or metal peel, or a sheet pan
- Single-edge razor blades and a lame handle
- Instant-read thermometer and a spray bottle
- Wire cooling rack and foil for freezing

Mix and Ferment One Master Dough

1. **Weigh the Master Formula in Grams**
   For three loaves, scale 1,000 g bread flour, 700 g water, 20 g fine sea salt, and 3 g instant dry yeast.
2. **Rest the Flour and Water Before Salt**
   Combine only the flour and water to a shaggy mass with no dry pockets - this is not a smooth dough and should not look appealing - then cover the bowl and let it sit 45 to 60 minutes at room temperature.
3. **Add Levain First, Then Salt Last**
   After the autolyse, incorporate your leavening.
4. **Build Strength With Timed Stretch-and-Folds**
   Bulk-ferment covered at 75 to 78 F for 3.5 to 4.5 hours, and during the first two hours perform four sets of stretch-and-folds about 30 minutes apart.
5. **Stop Bulk at the Windowpane Test**
   Judge the end of bulk fermentation three ways, not by the clock alone.

Divide, Pre-Shape, and Rest for Tension

6. **Scale Three Pieces With One Clean Cut**
   Turn the dough onto a lightly floured bench and divide it with a bench scraper in one confident press rather than a sawing motion; sawing tears the skin you are about to rely on.
7. **Pre-Shape Each Piece for a Taut Skin**
   The pre-shape is where most of the final structure comes from, and it is deliberately gentler than the

finished form.

8. **Bench Rest Twenty to Thirty Minutes**

   Leave the pre-shapes uncovered on the bench, seam side down, for 20 to 30 minutes at 74 to 78 F.

9. **Resist Adding Bench Flour to Sticky Dough**

   At 70 percent hydration the dough feels stickier than most people expect, especially in a warm kitchen, and the instinct is to work in handfuls of bench flour.

10. **Check Temperature and Slackness Before Shaping**

    Before the final shape, confirm the pieces are at 72 to 76 F (22 to 24 C).

Shape and Score the Three Forms

11. **Finish the Boule With a Drum-Tight Skin**

    Flip the rested boule piece smooth side down, fold the far edge to the center, then the left and right edges, then fold the near edge over and roll the whole parcel over so the seams stack underneath.

12. **Form the Batard With Three Folds**

    For the batard, flip the oblong piece smooth side down and press it gently into a rectangle roughly 8 by 6 inches, keeping the top skin intact and the bubbles where they are.

13. **Roll a Long Loaf to Baguette Length**

    Take the third piece, press it into a loose 12-inch oval, and repeat the three-fold sequence: far third down and sealed, near third up and sealed, fold in half lengthwise and close the seam with the heel of one hand.

14. **Score Each Shape for a Planned Split**

    Score the moment the loaves leave the baskets, with a fresh single-edge blade held about 30 degrees to the surface rather than straight down.

15. **Proof Until the Poke Test Rebounds Slowly**

    You have two options, and the second is better for learning to score.

Bake, Cool, and Use Every Loaf

16. **Preheat the Stone or Steel One Hour**

    Put a baking stone or steel on the middle rack and preheat 45 to 60 minutes at 500 F (260 C) - closer to a full hour for a thick cordierite stone, 45 minutes for steel, which stores and delivers heat faster and gives the crispest bottom on a long loaf.

17. **Bake With Steam and Time Each Shape**

    Steam keeps the outer skin gelatinized and stretchable for the first 15 to 20 minutes, which is what lets your cuts open instead of cracking.

18. **Pull at Internal Temperature, Then Cool**

    Test with an instant-read thermometer in the center of the crumb, keeping the probe out of the pan: lean artisan loaves finish between 195 and 210 F (90 to 99 C), with the thin long loaf landing nearer 195 to 200 F and the fat boule nearer 205 to 210 F.

19. **Read Crumb and Crust Back to the Shape**

    Slice one of each shape the same day and diagnose from a fresh cut face.

20. **Turn Day-Two Loaves Into New Meals**

    Yesterday's artisan loaf beats fresh bread in three applications.

Sources

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