



A Bread Baking Kickstart

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Making Dough at Home
in Your Spare Time

Editors Cut

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There's No Knead - Or Is There

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 Jeffrey's Bread

Kim did two very smart things early in our marriage - she insisted the first was accidental.

The first meal she ever cooked for us, she food-poisoned me.

She made fish and under cooked it. It didn't look right to her so she microwaved her portion.

Somehow she forgot to microwave my portion.

I was really sick.

Honestly, I think she felt worse than I did.

The second thing she did was to treat me to cooking lessons and one of the first things we learned was to make focaccia to go along with a meal.

It was a revelation.

Kim and I would often mix up a focaccia and then not bother to make the meal that was supposed to go along with it. We'd just dip the bread in olive oil and balsamic vinegar and eat it with a salad.

In this chapter we will make a few different focaccia. The recipes are exactly the same but we use different levels of hydration.

The dough will be dramatically different and you'll see the differences in mixing them and baking with them.

We'll also use essentially the same formulas and treat them a little differently to get our first real loaves of bread.

The first one will be so liquid that we'll pour it into a loaf pan.

The second one will be the no knead bread that you've heard so much about.

The third one will be a great combination of an easy to make loaf that has great structure and tastes good that I learned from Jeffrey Hamelman. I call it Jeffrey's bread.

Along the way we'll look at scaling recipes and baking with steam.

Here's a handy rule of thumb for small amounts of yeast and salt.

Instant yeast is about 3g per teaspoon. If a recipe calls for 1-2g you can safely use 1/2 t, for 3g use 1 t, for 4-5g use 1 1/2t, and for 6g use 2 tsp. You can weigh amounts over 6g.

Morton's kosher salt is about 16g per tablespoon. If a recipe calls for 1g use 1/4 t, for 2-3g use 1/2 t, for 4-6g use 1 t, and for 7-9g use

1 1/2t. You can weigh amounts over 9g.

Diamond Crystal kosher salt is about 8g per tablespoon. You roughly use twice the volume of Diamond Crystal as you do of Morton's. You can use the same volume estimates as we used for Instant yeast.

Let's get started with our wet focaccia.

No-Knead Bread

Jim Lahey was not the first to develop an unkneaded bread, but between his books and a [New York Times](#) article his technique became the iconic version.

The big idea is that dough needs to develop gluten to have the strength it needs to trap the gas and expand in the oven to become that airy product we love.

One way to develop the gluten is to knead the dough and start to build the structure by hand. We'll knead the heck out of an assortment of doughs in the next chapter.

As we've seen in this chapter, if the dough is wet enough, it can develop this gluten on its own if we give it enough time.

This technique is perfect for a home baker.

Lahey's Unkneaded Bread

The New York Times article has recently been updated to correct some of the measurements. In particular, the hydration given has been corrected to 80%.

Wet doughs are easy to mix but hard to handle. We'll start with 80% in this section and revise it in the section on mental calculations at the end of this chapter.

The salt in this dough is a little less than 2% and the yeast is quite low at 1/4%. The low yeast is because this dough sits quite a long time. Too much yeast would result in too much activity and the dough would be over-proofed before you were ready to bake it.

Let's make a loaf that's around 500g. After baking it will roughly be a pound. Remember, you can scale up if you'd like.

Formula:

Ingredients	Amount	Baker's %
Flour	280g	100
Water	224g	80
Salt	6g	2
Yeast	1g	0.25
<hr/>		
Total	511g	182.25

I'll go into further depth with the process in a minute, but for consistency, here's what you need for this recipe.

Process:

- Mix the dry ingredients together. Add the water and use a dough scraper to thoroughly mix the wet and dry ingredients into a wet, sticky mass.
- Rest covered for 12 hours. After this you can refrigerate for another 12-16 hours.
- Moving quickly, pre-shape into a round and place on a floured surface.
- Rest for fifteen minutes then shape into a round and place it seam side up on a well-floured kitchen towel that you've placed in a bowl at least twice as big as the dough. Flour a second towel and put it on over the dough.
- Preheat the oven to 450 degrees F/230 degrees C. Also preheat a sheet pan or a dutch oven.
- Once the dough has doubled in size, place it on the sheet pan or in the dutch oven and bake for twenty minutes.
- If you're using a dutch oven, remove the lid. In either case look at the bread. If it is browning to quickly reduce the oven to 420 degrees F/215 degrees C.
- Continue baking until the bread is dark brown and sounds hollow when you thump it.

What follows is a more detailed description of the process.

Mixing

You're going to bake this fourteen hours or so after mixing it. If you like, twelve hours after mixing it you can refrigerate it overnight.

The point is that there's a trade-off. If you don't want to knead, you have to give the dough enough time to do its thing.

Suppose I want to bake this Saturday morning and Saturdays I wake up around 8 am.

Either, I can mix the dough around 8 pm Friday night and leave it on the counter overnight, or I can mix it earlier in the day on Friday, say 9 am, and shape it and put it in the refrigerator at 8 or 9 pm.

Also, this method is pretty forgiving if you're off by an hour or so and finally, if your home is a little cool this can take longer to get to the point you want which extends the time.

If you're an early riser, this is an easy dough to mix first thing in the morning while you're making your coffee. You then can shape it when you come home and bake it after dinner.

Add the ingredients to the bowl. Some people add the water first, I tend to mix the flour, salt, and yeast and then add the water to that.

Use a dough scraper and bring the dough together. All you are doing is mixing the wet with the dry and making sure there are no dry bits of flour left.

The dough is a sticky mess. It will probably stick to the dough scraper so you'll have to periodically use your fingers to pull the dough sticking to the scraper off and put it back on the dough in the bowl.

Continue to scoop under the dough and flip it onto itself and press until you get a shaggy mass of dough with no dry spots.

It's not going to look like it will ever be bread.

Before you leave it, grab some of it with your hand and give it a pull. There's no resistance. The dough has no strength.

Cover it with plastic wrap or a wet towel and leave it in a warm spot for twelve hours.

Shape and bake

After twelve hours the dough has changed dramatically.

It is smooth and if you grab some of it with your hand and gently pull you'll feel it pull back a bit.

Flour a surface and use the dough scraper to scrape the dough out of the bowl onto the surface.

If the dough is very wet you may need to dip your hands in flour to handle it. I put some flour on the board and dab my hands on the flour.

Either using your hands or the dough scraper and your hands, reach under the dough on one side, lift it up and fold it over itself. If you folded from top to bottom, do the same thing now from side to side.

You are preshaping the dough and giving it a little strength. If it doesn't feel strong enough, give it another fold or two then cover it with the plastic wrap and leave it for fifteen minutes to relax and embrace its new shape.

After it has rested, shape the dough into a ball. With a wet dough you will have to keep your hands floured and you'll have to move quickly.

When you are done, either place the ball seam side up on a well-floured kitchen towel that you've placed in a bowl at least twice as big as the dough. Flour a second towel and put it on over the dough.

Check the dough after an hour and a half. It should be nearly doubled in size. Place a sheet pan in the oven upside down and preheat the oven to 450 degrees F/230 degrees C.

Once the dough has doubled in size, remove the top towel and do one of two things.

Either, open the oven door and turn the dough out onto the sheet pan. This requires that you move quickly and carefully.

Or, if you have parchment paper, put a sheet of parchment paper on a peel or a cutting board. Turn the dough out of the bowl onto the

parchment paper. Open the oven door and slide the parchment paper with the dough onto the preheated sheet pan.

Bake for twenty minutes and then look at the bread. If it is browning to quickly reduce the oven to 420 degrees F/215 degrees C.

Check along the way but you'll probably need to bake for another twenty to thirty minutes. Check for doneness. The bread should be dark brown and sound hollow when you thump it.

A larger loaf may take as much as an hour total baking time. A small loaf can be done in twenty to thirty minutes.

Evaluation

Let the bread cool completely.

You should have a nice round loaf with a thick crisp crust and an open (plenty of holes) interior.

At this point you may think, "this was so easy, I'm not going to try any more bread recipes."

That's fine - but it would be a shame. We're going to make some small adjustments to this loaf and then bake a loaf that requires slightly more attention but has amazing results.

First, let's add an invisible ingredient to our bread that will improve the results.

Jeffrey's Bread

I can't say enough about Jeffrey Hamelman. He's the kind of teacher from whom you learn so much more than the subject matter. He's thoughtful, humble, an amazingly talented baker who understands deeply everything that can have an impact on the outcome of the bread.

The second class I took from Jeffrey at King Arthur Baking (then King Arthur Flour) was a week long class for professional bakers.

I am not a professional baker.

But Jeffrey was kind and patient with everyone. He took everyone from where we were and took us as far as he could, and gave us the tools and encouragement to keep going.

We mixed and folded and shaped and baked hundreds of loaves of bread that week.

For an amateur it was magical to work with huge spiral mixers that easily mixed fifty pounds of dough. The shaped bread went on tall racks which went into a giant proofing room. We used the same ovens that the King Arthur Bakery used to bake their bread each day.

And during down time Jeffrey would answer questions and tell stories.

One of his stories he told was that during the week he baked thousands of loaves with this professional equipment along with a team of bakers. But on Saturdays he made an unkneaded bread in a bowl using nothing more than a dough scraper. He would take the bowl of dough with him while he ran his errands and leave it on the seat of his truck beside him. Every half an hour he would fold the dough. When his errands were done and he was heading back to his house, this bread would be ready to shape.

That's the bread I want to teach you in this section. He calls it an unkneaded six-fold french bread. I call it Jeffrey's Bread.

This little amount of yeast called for is a rounded quarter teaspoon.

Jeffrey's Bread

This is a 73% hydration dough.

Formula:

Ingredients	Amount	Baker's %
Flour	280g	100
Water	204g	73
Salt	6g	2

Ingredients	Amount	Baker's %
Yeast	1.4g	0.5
<hr/>		
Total	491.4g	175.5

Again, here's a summary of the process. More details below.

Process:

- Mix the dry ingredients in a bowl. Add the water and stir it together with a dough scraper.
- Once the flour is incorporated, give it a series of 25 folds with the dough scraper as you rotate the bowl. With each stroke you are reaching under the dough with the scraper and lifting the dough up and folding it over the top. Make sure you don't lift so much that you tear the dough. The idea is to add strength not weaken it.
- Cover the bowl in a warm place for thirty minutes. Give it another series of 25 folds.
- Continue to cover and rest for thirty minutes punctuated by the folds until you have given the dough a total of six series of folds.
- Scrape your dough onto a floured board and pre-shape it into a ball. Let the ball rest seam side down on the floured counter. Cover the dough with a towel or plastic wrap.

- After twenty minutes shape the dough into a tight and well-rounded ball. Let it rise a final hour before baking. The dough will get bigger and relax a bit.
- Place an inverted sheet pan, a baking stone or steel, or a dutch oven in the oven and preheat the oven to 480 degrees F / 250 degrees C.
- After an hour take a sharp knife and make two vertical cuts about a half inch deep. One should be north-south and the other east-west so they cross in the center of the top of the dough.
- If you're cooking in a dutch oven, remove the lid after twenty minutes. In either case, check to see if it's browning too quickly. If so, reduce the temperature of the oven. Keep an eye on the bread every ten minutes or so, but you want to allow it to develop a nice brown crust and sound hollow when it is thumped.
- Once the loaf has cooled, you should have a nice open crumb with a beautiful crisp crust.

Here's a more detailed description of the process.

Mixing

Mix the dry ingredients in a bowl. Add the water and stir it together with a dough scraper.

The goal here is to make sure there are to make sure all of the flour has been moistened. This may take a while. If you made Lahy's loaf at 80%, this will take a bit longer to accomplish but should be a little less sticky.

Once the flour is incorporated, we're going to give it a nice series of folds.

On each stroke, scoop under the dough ball and lift the bottom up and fold it down over the top. I'm right handed so I work from right to left. I scoop under the right side and lift it up and lay it over the top towards the left. Others have you start at the far end of the bowl and scoop back towards your body, lift it over the top and fold it towards yourself.

Whichever you choose, once you have folded over the top, rotate the bowl (it doesn't matter which way but I tend to rotate clockwise), and repeat the stroke. I rotate the bowl around a quarter turn each time. If it's a lot of dough I might rotate less. It doesn't matter.

Hamelman recommends twenty-five strokes. I think this is a nice number because I've noticed that without having a set number, I always quit too early.

This counts as the first fold in the six fold recipe. It is the initial mix in Lahy's.

The dough is still shaggy and not smooth and has little or no strength.

Cover the dough with plastic wrap.

Here's where the process diverges from the no knead loaf. In that case we used time to continue to develop the gluten. We let the dough rest without touching it for twelve hours. We could do that here, but instead we're building strength by folding the dough at half hour intervals.

The next five folds

After thirty minutes look at the dough. It is already beginning to look less shaggy and more organized.

Repeat the process of scooping and folding twenty-five times.

The dough should be a lot less sticky than it was thirty minutes ago and it should look pretty smooth. Give it a gentle tug and you can feel it start to resist.

This was our second fold.

Repeat this process every half hour four more times for a total of six folds.

Shape and Bake

The dough should come out of the bowl pretty easily. Gently scrape your dough onto a floured board and pre-shape it into a ball. Let the ball rest seam side down on the floured counter covered with a towel or plastic.

We're going to bake this as a round loaf so after twenty minutes shape the dough into a tight and well-rounded ball. Let it rise a final hour before baking. The dough will get bigger and relax a bit.

Place an inverted sheet pan, a baking stone or steel, or a dutch oven in the oven and preheat the oven to 480 degrees F / 250 degrees C.

After an hour take a sharp knife and make two vertical cuts about a half inch deep. One should be north-south and the other east-west so they cross in the center of the top of the dough.

Check the bread after twenty minutes. If it's browning too quickly, reduce the temperature of the oven. Keep an eye on the bread every ten minutes or so, but you want to allow it to develop a nice brown crust and sound hollow when it is thumped.

Once the loaf has cooled, you should have a nice open crumb with a beautiful crisp crust.

We won't get the huge holes you'll see with a higher hydration dough, but I find this to be a simple bread with beautiful results.



We'll wrap up this chapter with a discussion of mental calculations.