

CIABATTA

Makes two loaves approx 600 g each.

Day #1 - Biga:

½ teaspoon instant yeast
1 cup warm water (110-115 degrees)
225 g bread flour
110 g all-purpose flour
16 g whole wheat flour
16 g rye flour
¾ cup water



Sprinkle the yeast over the warm water, stir, and let it stand for 5-10 minutes. Mix the flours in the bowl of a stand mixer. Measure ½ teaspoon of the yeasted water into the flour mixture (throw the rest away—this is only to be able to measure 1/384 teaspoon of yeast). Then add the ¾ cup water, chilled in the summer, warm in the winter. This dough will be very firm and resistant to kneading, but persevere! Add an extra tablespoon or two of water only if absolutely necessary. Place into an oiled container, cover and ferment overnight (18–24 hours) at room temperature. (Don't be alarmed if it does nothing for at least ten hours. This is as it should be. It will eventually triple in volume and then flatten out, appearing to have the texture of lumpy oatmeal.)

Day #2: Make Dough & Bake:

360 g all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon instant yeast
2 ¾ teaspoons salt
1 ½ cups lukewarm water
fermented biga

Tools required for this step:

bench knife (scraper)
large stainless steel mixing bowl, 40 cm diameter or larger
couche or parchment



Place all dough ingredients into a mixing bowl fitted with a dough hook. Mix on low speed until a rough dough is formed. Increase speed to medium low and continue to work the dough until it is fairly smooth, about 5 minutes. (This is a very soft dough—add extra water if it is too firm. It should be a little slacker than muffin dough but stiffer than cake batter.)

Have 250 g more of flour at hand. This will be needed during the turning process and final proof.

Place the dough into an oiled container large enough for the dough to double in bulk. Cover and ferment for 20 minutes. Scrape the dough out onto a well-floured bench, carefully stretch or press the dough out to double its size, and do a gentle turn by the folding method.

Rest for another 20 minutes and repeat (place a large mixing bowl over the dough). Each time, just before covering, sprinkle with some of the 250g of flour you have at hand. You will do a turn at 20, 40, 60 and 80 minutes, and then let the dough finish proofing for another 70-100 minutes (a total proofing time, with turns, of 2 ½-3 hours). You will be surprised at how much the dough firms up during this process!

Heavily flour a couche or two squares of parchment. Flour the top of the dough and the work surface and turn the dough out. With a metal scraper, cut the dough approximately in half. Gently shape and stretch into rectangles, then loosely fold into thirds like a letter.

Place ciabatte seam-side down on the couche or parchment, sprinkle the tops with more flour and loosely cover. Let them proof until they are very soft and well-expanded, and barely spring back when gently pressed, about 45 minutes to 1 hour depending on room temperature.

After shaping the dough, arrange a rack on the bottom shelf in the oven and place a baking stone on it (unglazed ceramic tiles work great, too!). Preheat the oven to 450 degrees.

When ciabatte are ready to bake, place a piece of parchment paper on a peel if you have been doing the final proof on a couche. Carefully flip the loaves onto the peel, seam side up, and stretch them very gently to make them rectangular. Dimple the dough all over with your fingertips, pressing all the way down to the paper (don't worry—the bread will recover in the oven!). Slide the loaves on the paper onto the baking stone.

Bake them until very dark brown, 35-40 minutes, rotating halfway through the bake time. (Remove parchment at the half way mark when you rotate them.) Let cool on a rack for at least 45 minutes.

Do not store in plastic: this will cause the crunchy crust to soften. However, if you wish to freeze it, store in plastic then refresh by thawing for 3-4h at room temperature then popping the loaf into a 350F oven for about 15 min.

Based on "Craig Ponsford's Ciabatta" from Lindsey's Luscious -
<http://lindseyluscious.blogspot.com/2006/03/ciabatta.html>