

# Bread Baking Basics

This playbook outlines the fundamental steps involved in baking bread from scratch. It covers the essential phases of kneading, proofing, and baking required to create bread with a desirable crust and texture.

## Step 1: **Ingredients**

Gather all necessary ingredients, like flour, yeast, salt, water, and any other desired additions specific to the bread recipe being used.

## Step 2: **Mixing**

Combine the ingredients in a large mixing bowl, stirring until a rough dough begins to form.

## Step 3: **Kneading**

Knead the dough on a floured surface for about 10 minutes or until it becomes smooth and elastic. This develops the gluten which gives the bread its texture.

## Step 4: **First Proof**

Place the kneaded dough in a greased bowl, cover with a damp cloth, and let it rise in a warm place until it doubles in size, typically about 1-2 hours, depending on the yeast and environment.

## Step 5: **Shaping**

Once the dough has proofed, punch it down gently, then shape it into the desired form for your loaf, and place it in the appropriate baking dish or on a baking sheet.

## Step 6: **Second Proof**

Allow the shaped dough to rise for another 30 minutes to an hour, until it puffs up again but is not quite doubled.

## Step 7: **Preheat Oven**

Preheat your oven to the temperature specified by your recipe. This is usually done during the second proof to ensure the oven is ready for baking.

## Step 8: **Scoring**

Just before baking, make shallow cuts on the surface of the dough with a sharp knife or lame. This allows the dough to expand evenly in the oven.

## Step 9: **Baking**

Bake the bread in the preheated oven according to the recipe's recommended time and temperature until the crust is golden brown and the loaf sounds hollow when tapped on the bottom.

## Step 10: **Cooling**

Remove the bread from the oven and let it cool on a wire rack before slicing to allow the crumb structure to set.

# **General Notes**

## **Yeast Activation**

If using active dry yeast, make sure to activate it in warm water prior to mixing, unless the recipe calls for a different method. Instant yeast can generally be mixed directly with dry ingredients.

## **Humidity and Temperature**

Be aware that humidity and temperature can affect the rise of the dough. Adjust the proofing time as necessary.

## **Baking Stones**

For a crisper crust, consider using a baking stone and adding steam to your oven during the first few minutes of baking.