

# RUSTIC BREADS



PLACE THIS DIVIDER IN FRONT OF PAGE 115.



## RUSTIC BREADS

Almost No-Knead Bread ■ **117**

Almost No-Knead Bread  
with Olives, Rosemary,  
and Parmesan ■ **117**

Almost No-Knead Seeded Rye  
Bread ■ **117**

Almost No-Knead Whole Wheat  
Bread ■ **117**

Almost No-Knead Cranberry-  
Pecan Bread ■ **117**

Hearty Country Bread **118**

Same-Day Hearty Country  
Bread **119**

Rustic Italian Bread **122**

Rustic Olive and Thyme Italian  
Bread **124**

Rustic Raisin and Walnut Italian  
Bread **124**

Same-Day Rustic Italian  
Bread **124**

Ciabatta Bread **125**

Same-Day Ciabatta Bread **126**

Baguettes **127**

Slow-Rise Baguettes **128**

Deli-Style Rye Bread **129**

Same-Day Deli-Style Rye  
Bread **130**

My First Sourdough **131**

## Troubleshooting: YEAST BREAD

We've seen nearly everything that can go wrong when making a yeast bread. (But luckily nearly all the mistakes we've made were still edible!) Here are a few of the most common things that can go wrong, why they happen, and how to fix them.

**problem:** the dough is too wet or too dry

**solution:** add flour or water in tablespoon increments

With the recipes in this book it is unlikely that your dough will be too dry since in general we reserve  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup flour to compensate for the way that different brands of flour absorb liquid. (It's also easier to incorporate more flour into a wet dough and harder to add more water to a tough, dry dough.) If your dough is too wet and sticky after mixing for several minutes, add more flour, 2 tablespoons at a time, until the dough clears the sides of the bowl, but sticks to the very bottom. If your dough is too dry, add water in 1-tablespoon increments until the desired consistency is reached.

**problem:** the dough isn't rising at all

**solution:** start over, using fresh yeast

If after a few hours the dough hasn't risen at all, or it started to rise then stopped abruptly, the yeast is dead and you need to start over. There are three main reasons why yeast doesn't work: 1) it is old, 2) the liquid used to make the dough is too warm (over 120 degrees), or 3) the rising location is too warm.

**problem:** bread is rising too slowly

**solution:** move it to a warmer location

A drafty or cold room can wreak havoc with rising times, slowing the yeast down to a snail's pace. If your bread is rising slowly or your kitchen is particularly drafty or cold try the following: Create a warm rising spot by heating the oven at 200 degrees for 10 minutes and then turning it off. Make sure the oven is off before placing the dough inside.

**problem:** the loaf deflates or tears during baking

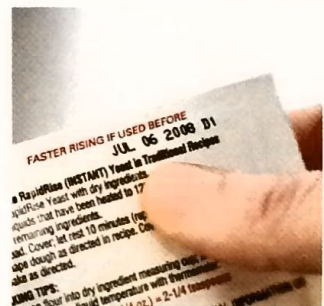
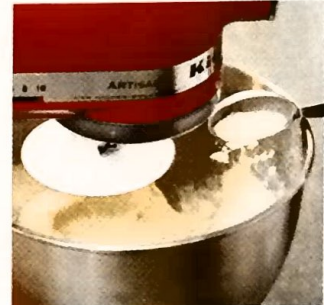
**solution:** test the dough multiple times during rising

When a shaped loaf is allowed to rise for too long before baking (what bakers call over-proofing), the bread rises to its maximum height, and then begins to fall. Over-proofed bread, therefore, will turn out looking flat. If a shaped loaf is not allowed to rise long enough before baking (under-proofing), it will continue to rise in the oven. Since the crust sets during the first few minutes of baking, the still-rising dough is then forced to break through the crust, resulting in an unattractive tear in the crust or even a small attached loaf lump. To tell when bread is ready for baking, poke it gently with a knuckle; if it barely springs back, it's time to bake.

**problem:** the crust turns soft during cooling

**solution:** re-crisp before serving or bake longer

If the weather is particularly humid, bread that comes out of the oven crisp can turn soft as it cools; simply re-crisp the bread in a 450-degree oven for a few minutes before serving. If the problem persists even when the weather is not humid (or you just like really crisp bread), consider reducing the oven temperature by 25 to 50 degrees and adding 10 or so minutes to the baking time. This will produce a thicker, heartier crust that is crisper.



## At a Glance: ALMOST NO-KNEAD BREAD



**1. Mix and rest:** Make the dough by folding the wet ingredients into the dry with a rubber spatula until the dough comes together and looks shaggy. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let sit at room temperature for at least 8 hours or up to 18 hours. Letting the dough sit for such a long time actually develops the gluten, much like kneading—this is the trick to making this bread. Don't shortchange this resting time or the bread won't have enough structure and will turn out very flat.

**2. Knead it 10 to 15 times by hand:** Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured counter and knead by hand to form a smooth, round ball, 10 to 15 times. These few turns done by hand on the counter make a big difference to the texture of the final loaf, and it's very easy to do.

**3. Shape the loaf:** After kneading the loaf, shape the dough into a ball by pulling the edges into the middle.

**4. Let it rise in a skillet:** Transfer the dough, seam side down, to a parchment-lined 10-inch skillet. We found that the skillet is the perfect shape to support the round loaf while it rises. Make sure to grease the parchment so the dough won't stick.

**5. Bake in a preheated Dutch oven:** Heat up a large heavy Dutch oven with a tight-fitting lid on the lowest rack of a 500-degree oven; then, using the parchment, transfer the bread to the hot pot to bake. The pot traps steam and will give the loaf a thick, hearty crust while helping it keep its round shape.

**6. Bake covered and uncovered:** Bake the bread covered for 30 minutes then remove the lid and continue to bake until the center of the loaf registers 210 degrees on an instant-read thermometer and the crust is deep golden brown, 20 to 30 minutes. By baking the bread both covered and uncovered, you can get a chewy interior and a thick, hearty crust.

**great for beginners**

## ALMOST NO-KNEAD BREAD

**MAKES** 1 large round loaf

*This bread bakes best in a heavy enameled cast-iron Dutch oven with a tight-fitting lid, but it will work in any Dutch oven. If your Dutch oven is not very heavy, the crust of the bread will turn out thinner and lighter. For the best flavor, use a mild-flavored beer, like Budweiser, Stella Artois, or Heineken; a mild nonalcoholic beer also works well.*

- 3 cups (15 ounces) all-purpose flour**
- ¼ teaspoon instant or rapid-rise yeast**
- 1½ teaspoons salt**
- ¾ cup water, room temperature**
- ½ cup mild-flavored beer (see note above), room temperature**
- 1 tablespoon white vinegar**

**1.** Whisk the flour, yeast, and salt together in a large bowl. Fold in the water, beer, and vinegar with a rubber spatula until the dough comes together and looks shaggy. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let sit at room temperature for at least 8 hours or up to 18 hours.

**2.** Lay an 18 by 12-inch sheet of parchment paper inside a 10-inch skillet and spray with vegetable oil spray. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured counter and knead by hand to form a smooth, round ball, 10 to 15 times. Following the photo on page 116, shape the dough into a ball by pulling the edges into the middle with floured hands. Transfer the dough, seam side down, to the prepared skillet.

**3.** Mist the dough with vegetable oil spray and cover loosely with plastic wrap. Let rise at room temperature until doubled in size and the dough barely springs back when poked with a knuckle, about 2 hours.

**4.** About 30 minutes before baking, adjust an oven rack to the lowest position, place a large covered Dutch oven on the rack, and heat the oven to 500 degrees.

**5.** Lightly flour the top of the dough and score the top of the loaf with a razor blade or sharp knife following the photos on page 130. Carefully remove the pot from the oven and remove the lid. Pick up the parchment and dough and carefully lower them into the hot pot,

letting any excess parchment hang over the edge. Cover the pot.

**6.** Place the pot in the oven, reduce the oven temperature to 425 degrees, and bake covered for 30 minutes. Remove the lid and continue to bake until the center of the loaf registers 210 degrees on an instant-read thermometer and the crust is deep golden brown, 20 to 30 minutes. Carefully remove the bread from the pot, transfer to a wire rack, and let cool to room temperature, about 2 hours, before serving.

### VARIATIONS

#### ALMOST NO-KNEAD BREAD WITH OLIVES, ROSEMARY, AND PARMESAN

Whisk 2 cups grated Parmesan cheese and 1 tablespoon minced fresh rosemary into the flour and add ½ cup chopped, pitted green olives with the water.

#### ALMOST NO-KNEAD SEEDED RYE BREAD

Substitute 1⅛ cups rye flour for 1⅜ cups of the all-purpose flour. Whisk 2 tablespoons caraway seeds into the flour.

#### ALMOST NO-KNEAD WHOLE WHEAT BREAD

Substitute 1 cup whole wheat flour for 1 cup of the all-purpose flour. Stir 2 tablespoons honey into the water before adding it to the dry ingredients in step 1.

#### ALMOST NO-KNEAD CRANBERRY-PECAN BREAD

Add ½ cup dried cranberries and ½ cup toasted pecan halves (see page 48) to the flour mixture in step 1.

### *Test Kitchen Tip:* LAZY MAN'S BREAD

This easy-to-make bread is designed to require very little kneading. The trick is to make the dough quite wet and to let it rest for a long period of time on the counter before shaping and baking. The long resting time is what gives the loaf its structure (it actually develops the gluten), whereas in our other breads, this structure is developed through the act of kneading. To boost the flavor of this simple bread (which, unlike our other rustic breads, has no starter), we found that a little beer and a dash of white vinegar lent a valuable but subtle "breadly" tang.



A mix of whole wheat and rye flour in the sponge gives this bread its hearty flavor.

## HEARTY COUNTRY BREAD

**MAKES** 1 large round loaf

*Don't forget to reduce the oven temperature immediately after putting the loaf in the oven. This loaf takes two days to make, but for a faster version (without the sponge), see the same-day variation on page 119; it will be somewhat less flavorful but still very good. If you don't have a standing mixer, see Hand-Mixing Method for Rustic Breads on page 122.*

### SPONGE

- 1 cup warm water (110 degrees)**
- 1 cup (5½ ounces) whole wheat flour**

- ½ cup (2¾ ounces) rye flour**
- ½ teaspoon instant or rapid-rise yeast**

### DOUGH

- 3½-4 cups (19¼ to 22 ounces) bread flour**
- 2 tablespoons honey**
- 1 teaspoon instant or rapid-rise yeast**
- 1½ cups warm water (110 degrees)**
- 2 teaspoons salt**

**1. FOR THE SPONGE:** Stir all of the ingredients together in a medium bowl until combined. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit at room temperature until the sponge has risen and fallen (see page 119), at least 6 hours or up to 24 hours.

**2. FOR THE DOUGH:** Combine 3½ cups of the bread flour, honey, and yeast in a standing mixer fitted with the dough hook. With the mixer on low speed, add the water and mix until the dough comes together, about 2 minutes. Stop the mixer, cover the bowl with plastic wrap (no need to remove it from the mixer), and let sit at room temperature for 20 minutes.

**3.** Remove the plastic wrap, add the sponge and salt, and knead the dough on medium-low speed until it is smooth and elastic, about 8 minutes. If after 4 minutes more flour is needed, add the remaining ½ cup bread flour, 2 tablespoons at a time, until the dough clears the sides of the bowl, but sticks to the bottom (see page 97).

**4.** Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured counter and knead by hand to form a smooth, round ball. Place the dough in a large, lightly oiled bowl and cover tightly with greased plastic wrap. Let rise in a warm place until doubled in size, 1 to 1½ hours.

### SHAPING A RUSTIC ROUND LOAF



**1.** After pressing the dough into a square and dimpling it, fold the top and bottom thirds of the dough over the middle like a business letter.



**2.** Gently lift and tuck the sides underneath.



**3.** Gently round the dough into a smooth, taut ball. Cup your hands slightly around the dough and drag it over the counter in a circular motion.

## A Sponge Makes a Better Rustic Bread

We start most of our rustic bread recipes by creating a sponge—a small mixture of flour, water, and yeast which is allowed to ferment for at least 6 hours to develop mildly sour and nutty flavors. More flour, yeast, and water are added to the sponge to build a bread dough. The resulting bread is much chewier and more complex in flavor than breads made with unfermented commercial yeast. What we call a sponge actually has many names, including pre-ferment, starter, *biga* in Italy, and *poolish* in France. But no matter what you call it, the function of this pre-dough mixture is pretty much the same. The key to using our sponge is to let it rise for about 2 hours then wait for it to fall (about 4 hours) before using. The fall indicates that the yeast is active and ready to go. Once the sponge has fallen, it can be held for up to 24 hours at room temperature before using.



Freshly Mixed Sponge



Risen Sponge



Fallen Sponge

5. Line a large rimless (or inverted) baking sheet with parchment paper. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured counter, press it into a 10-inch square without tearing it, and gently dimple it with your fingertips. Following the photos on page 118, fold the bottom and top thirds of the dough over the middle. Tuck the sides underneath and gently round the dough with cupped hands. Place the loaf on the prepared baking sheet. Mist the loaf with vegetable oil spray, cover loosely with plastic wrap, and let rise in a warm place until nearly doubled in size and the dough barely springs back when poked with a knuckle, 1 to 1½ hours.

6. Meanwhile, adjust an oven rack to the lower-middle position, place a baking stone on the rack, and heat the oven to 500 degrees. Let the baking stone heat for at least 30 minutes (but no longer than 1 hour).

7. Score the top of the loaf with a razor blade or sharp knife following the photos on page 130, and spray the loaf lightly with water. Carefully slide the loaf and parchment onto the hot baking stone. Immediately reduce the oven temperature to 425 degrees and bake until the center of the loaf registers 210 degrees on an instant-read thermometer and the crust is deep golden

brown, 35 to 40 minutes, rotating the loaf half-way through baking.

8. Transfer the loaf to a wire rack, discard the parchment, and let cool to room temperature, about 2 hours, before serving.

### VARIATION

#### SAME-DAY HEARTY COUNTRY BREAD

*If you don't have time for a sponge, this loaf can be made the same day, but the flavor won't be as complex, and the crumb will be finer and more uniform (like sandwich bread).*

Omit the sponge. When assembling the dough in step 2, increase the water to 2½ cups, increase the yeast to 1 envelope (2¼ teaspoons), and add 1 cup whole wheat flour and ½ cup rye flour.

### *Test Kitchen Tip:* MAKE IT WET

After making many mediocre loaves of Hearty Country Bread, we had a “Eureka!” moment: wetter dough produced the big-league chewiness we were after. Wet doughs stretch the gluten to its maximum, exposing it fully to the heat; this makes a chewier loaf and crisper crust. If you keep your hands well floured, it will help prevent the dough from making a sticky mess while you're trying to shape it.

## At a Glance: HOW TO MAKE YEAST BREAD

Don't let lengthy yeast bread recipes intimidate you. Making yeast bread is easy—even if you're a beginner—and requires just a few minutes of hands-on work. Below is a brief overview of how yeast breads are made, using our Hearty Country Bread (page 118) as an example. Once you learn these basics, following a bread recipe will be a cinch. The most important thing to remember is that good bread takes both time and patience—you must wait for the bread dough to be ready, but when ready, the bread dough will not wait for you. As most professional bakers will tell you, bread baking is a game of “hurry up and wait.”



**1. Weigh your ingredients:** When measuring out ingredients for a dough, bakers often use the phrase “scale out” rather than “measure out” because they use a scale to weigh the ingredients rather than using measuring cups. Because the ratio of flour to water greatly impacts the end result, we recommend weighing your ingredients before making bread. That said, whether you scale or measure, the nice thing about bread dough is that it is very flexible—you will have plenty of time during kneading to fix a wet or dry dough if necessary. The only thing to keep in mind is temperature, since yeast is a live culture; if your liquid ingredients are too warm (over 120 degrees), they will kill the yeast.



**2. Form a shaggy dough:** Mixing only takes a minute or two and we like to do the mixing right in the standing mixer bowl that will be used later for kneading. The point of mixing is to evenly distribute water into the dry ingredients (which starts the development of gluten), and form a very shaggy dough. Making a smooth, soft, malleable ball of dough is not the point here—we just care about incorporating the water into the flour. This step is particularly important for rustic doughs, because it lays the foundation for a strong gluten structure later during kneading and turning.

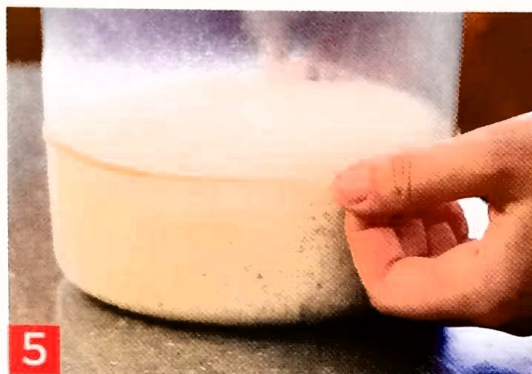


**3. Let it rest:** Many of our recipes let the dough rest after it's mixed—officially, this rest is called an autolyse. The point of this resting time is to let the flour absorb the water before it gets pushed around during kneading. Giving the flour a chance to hydrate has several advantages: it makes the dough less sticky and easier to knead, it cuts down on kneading time (excessive kneading leads to loss of flavor), and it gives the bread a more open crumb. An autolyse is especially important for leaner breads such as rustic loaves and baguettes; it is less critical for breads with more fat and flavoring ingredients, like sandwich bread and cinnamon swirl bread.



**4. Knead the dough:** Kneading is a very important step that takes 8 to 10 minutes in a standing mixer (or up to 30 minutes if kneading by hand), and this time should never be skimmed on. Kneading develops and organizes the gluten strands in the dough, which provides the bread's structure. Without good gluten structure, the bread will sag in the oven.





**5. Let the dough rise:** After the dough has been kneaded, it needs to rest, relax, and rise (usually for 1 to 1½ hours). The gluten, which was worked hard during kneading, will relax and become elastic and supple. Meanwhile, the yeast will begin to go to work—it eats the flour starch and releases carbon dioxide. The releasing of the carbon dioxide into the relaxed, elastic dough is like slowly blowing air into a balloon. The bread is ready for shaping when it has doubled in size. The key is knowing when that point is reached. The easiest way is to let the dough rise in a straight-sided container and mark its initial height with a rubber band.



**6. Shape the dough:** After the first rise, the dough is formed into the final shape of the bread, such as a round loaf, sandwich loaf, small rolls, or a long, skinny baguette. The shaping is done on the counter with “iron hands in kid gloves,” to quote an old baker’s phrase. Simply put, you need to firmly bend, fold, and roll the dough (which will have a will of its own at this point) into a tidy, sturdy shape without tearing or roughing up the dough’s surface.



**7. Let it rise a second time:** This second rise, also called proofing, is much like the first rise in that the dough needs to rest, relax, and rise. The only difference this time is that the yeast is already hard at work and the dough has been shaped into a loaf. You also shouldn’t let the bread overrise (overproof) or it will develop a slack shape, a dense, blobby texture, and a sour taste. Underrisen loaves will be dense and squat and taste largely of yeast. You can tell when the loaf is properly risen and ready to be baked when it has nearly doubled in size, and the dough barely springs back when poked with a knuckle (see page 115).



**8. Brush or slash before baking:** Heating up the oven (and a baking stone if you’re making rustic breads or rolls) is important, as is prepping the bread for baking. All loaves of bread should be brushed with something wet, such as water, oil, or a beaten egg—this moisture helps keep the surface of the bread elastic so that the bread can continue to rise nicely as it bakes in the oven. Some loaves and rolls with thick, rustic crusts are also slashed with a sharp knife or razor—this not only looks pretty, but the slash acts as a pleat to let the bread rise during baking (see page 130).



**9. Take the temp to tell doneness:** The best way to gauge the doneness of a loaf is internal temperature. Don’t be tempted to pierce the top crust in the center, though, as this will leave a conspicuous hole. Insert the thermometer from the side. (If the bread is in a loaf pan insert it just above the edge of the pan directing it at a downward angle.) Bread is generally done baking when its internal temperature registers 200 to 210 degrees. We don’t, however, recommend using this method for testing Babka (page 110) or Cinnamon Swirl Bread (page 107) because you could hit a patch of sugar, which would give you an inaccurate temperature reading.

# RUSTIC ITALIAN BREAD

**MAKES** 1 large loaf

*Don't forget to reduce the oven temperature after the first 10 minutes of baking. This loaf takes two days to make, but for a faster version (without the sponge), see the same-day variation on page 124; it will be slightly less flavorful but still very good.*

## SPONGE

- 2 cups (11 ounces) bread flour**
- 1 cup warm water (110 degrees)**
- ¼ teaspoon instant or rapid-rise yeast**

## DOUGH

- 3-3½ cups (16½ to 19¼ ounces) bread flour**
- 1 teaspoon instant or rapid-rise yeast**
- 1¼ cups warm water (110 degrees)**
- 2 teaspoons salt**

**1. FOR THE SPONGE:** Stir all of the ingredients together in a medium bowl until combined. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit at room temperature until the sponge has risen and fallen (see page 119), at least 6 hours or up to 24 hours.

**2. FOR THE DOUGH:** Combine 3 cups of the flour and the yeast in a standing mixer fitted with the dough hook. With the mixer on low speed, add the water and mix until the dough comes together, about 2 minutes. Stop the mixer, cover the bowl with plastic wrap (no need to remove it from the mixer), and let sit at room temperature for 20 minutes.

**3.** Remove the plastic wrap, add the sponge and salt, and knead the dough on medium-low speed until it is smooth and elastic, about 8 minutes. If after 4 minutes more flour is needed, add the remaining ½ cup flour, 2 tablespoons at a time, until the dough clears the sides of the bowl but sticks to the bottom (see page 97).

**4.** Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured counter and knead by hand to form a smooth, round ball. Place the dough in a large, lightly oiled bowl and cover tightly with greased plastic wrap. Let rise in a warm place until doubled in size, about 1 hour.

**5.** Following the photos on page 129, turn the dough in the bowl with a dough scraper or large

rubber spatula. Cover, let rise for 30 more minutes, then repeat the turning process. Cover and let rise until the dough has doubled in size, about 30 minutes longer.

**6.** Top a rimless (or inverted) baking sheet with parchment paper. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured counter, press it into a 10-inch square without tearing it, and gently dimple it with your fingertips. Following the photos on page 124, fold the top corners into the middle of the dough, then gently roll and pinch the dough into a torpedo shape. Transfer to the prepared baking sheet, seam side down, and gently tuck the dough into a taut loaf. Mist the loaf with vegetable oil spray, cover loosely with plastic wrap, and let rise in a warm place until nearly doubled in size and the dough barely springs back when poked with a knuckle, 1 to 1½ hours.

**7.** Meanwhile, adjust an oven rack to the lower-middle position, place a baking stone on the rack, and heat the oven to 500 degree. Let the baking stone heat for at least 30 minutes (but no longer than 1 hour).

## Hand-Mixing Method for Rustic Breads

Rustic breads are often made from big, wet doughs, which we find easiest to make using a standing mixer. However if you don't own one, you can still make great loaves of rustic bread using just your hands following the instructions below. These hand-mixing instructions will work with all of the recipes in this chapter except for the Ciabatta Bread (page 125) (for which a standing mixer is necessary).

Whisk the liquid ingredients together in a medium bowl. In a large bowl, whisk the dry ingredients together. Stir the liquid mixture into the dry ingredients along with the sponge (if using) with a rubber spatula until the dough comes together and looks shaggy. Turn the dough out onto a clean counter and knead by hand to form a smooth, round ball, 15 to 25 minutes, adding the remaining ½ cup flour as needed to prevent the dough from sticking to the counter. Transfer to a large lightly oiled bowl, cover with greased plastic wrap, and let rise as directed.

## At a Glance: RUSTIC ITALIAN BREAD



**1. Build flavor with a sponge:** Mixing some of the flour, water, and yeast together and letting this mixture (called a sponge) ferment on the counter is an easy way to build flavor in rustic bread (see page 119).

**2. Power nap:** After combining the dough ingredients (except the salt), cover and let sit for 20 minutes before kneading. This resting, known as autolyse, allows the flour more time to fully hydrate and lets the gluten relax, which makes the dough much easier to knead.

**3. Knead and add more flour:** Add the sponge and salt and knead the dough on medium-low speed for about 8 minutes. After about 4 minutes, check the consistency of the dough—it should stick just to the very bottom of the mixing bowl, but not to the sides (see page 97). If necessary, add more flour, 2 tablespoons at a time, until the consistency is just right. Our doughs are on the wet side—it is easier to add more flour to a wet dough than to add water to dry dough.

**4. Let rise in an oiled container:** After kneading, shape the dough into a tidy round and let it rise in a large lightly oiled bowl or container with straight sides, covered with greased plastic wrap. Greasing the bowl and plastic wrap ensures that the dough won't stick as it rises.

**5. Shape the dough twice:** After the dough has risen, gently roll it into a torpedo shape, being careful not to press all of the gas out of the puffy, risen dough. Transfer the shaped dough to a sheet of parchment, and reshape into a tidy, taut torpedo (see page 124). Cover with plastic wrap and let rise again for 1 to 1½ hours before baking.

**6. Use a baking stone and parchment:** The crisp, dark crust on the bottom of rustic bread is the result of baking it right on a baking stone. A layer of parchment between the bread and the baking stone makes transferring the bread easier.

## SHAPING A RUSTIC LOAF



1. After delicately pushing the dough into a 10-inch square, fold the top corners diagonally to the middle.



2. Using your fingertips and starting at the top of the dough, pull the underside of the dough up over the top, stretching it considerably, and begin to roll the dough up into a rough log. With each roll, press the seam firmly to seal. Continue to do this, forming the dough into a taut log, 5 to 7 more times.



3. Roll the dough onto its seam, gently slide your hands underneath each end, and transfer the loaf to the parchment-lined rimless (or inverted) baking sheet.



4. Finish shaping the loaf into a taut 16-inch-long torpedo-shaped loaf by tucking the edges under with your hands.

8. Score the top of the loaf with a razor blade or sharp knife following the photos on page 130 and spray the loaf lightly with water. Carefully slide the loaf and parchment onto the hot baking stone. Bake the bread for 10 minutes.

9. Rotate the bread, reduce the oven temperature to 400 degrees, and continue to bake until the center of the loaf registers 210 degrees on an instant-read thermometer and the crust is deep golden brown, 30 to 35 minutes.

10. Transfer the loaf to a wire rack, discard the parchment, and let cool to room temperature, about 2 hours, before serving.

### VARIATIONS

#### RUSTIC OLIVE AND THYME ITALIAN BREAD

Add 2 tablespoons minced fresh thyme to the mixer during the final minute of kneading and knead 2 cups pitted and halved oil-cured or kalamata olives into the dough by hand in step 4.

#### RUSTIC RAISIN AND WALNUT ITALIAN BREAD

Add 1 cup chopped toasted walnuts (see page 48) and 1 cup golden raisins to the mixer during the final minute of kneading.

#### SAME-DAY RUSTIC ITALIAN BREAD

*If you don't have time for a sponge, this loaf can be made the same day, but the flavor won't be as complex, and the crumb will be finer and more uniform (like sandwich bread).*

Omit the sponge. When assembling the dough in step 2, increase the amount of bread flour to 5 cups, increase the water to 2¼ cups, and increase the yeast to 1 envelope (2¼ teaspoons).

#### *Test Kitchen Tip:* CRUST AND CRUMB

We were baffled to find that the crust of this bread turned soft within minutes of emerging from the oven. The solution? We baked the loaf at 500 degrees for the first 10 minutes to maximize its height and then turned the oven down to 400 degrees to get a fantastically crisp crust. A similar technique also worked well for several other breads in this chapter.

## CIABATTA BREAD

**MAKES** 2 loaves

*This dough is wet and very, very sticky and cannot be kneaded by hand—a standing mixer is necessary here. This loaf takes two days to make, but for a faster version (without the sponge), see the same-day variation on page 126; it will be slightly less flavorful but still very good.*

### SPONGE

- 2½ cups (12½ ounces) all-purpose flour**
- 1½ cups warm water (110 degrees)**
- ¼ teaspoon instant or rapid-rise yeast**

### DOUGH

- 4 cups (20 ounces) all-purpose flour**
- 1 teaspoon instant or rapid-rise yeast**
- 1½ cups warm water (110 degrees)**
- 2 teaspoons salt**

**1. FOR THE SPONGE:** Stir all of the ingredients together in a medium bowl until combined. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit at room temperature until the sponge has risen and fallen (see page 119), at least 6 hours or up to 24 hours.

**2. FOR THE DOUGH:** Combine the flour and yeast in a standing mixer fitted with the dough hook. With the mixer on low speed, add the water and mix until the dough comes together, about 2 minutes. Stop the mixer, cover the bowl with plastic wrap (no need to remove it from the mixer), and let sit at room temperature for 20 minutes.

**3.** Remove the plastic wrap, add the sponge and salt, and knead the dough on medium-low speed until it is shiny and uniform (the dough will not clear the sides of the bowl), 3 to 5 minutes.

**4.** Scrape the dough out into a large, lightly oiled bowl and cover tightly with plastic wrap. Let rise in a warm place for 1 hour. Dust the dough with flour and, following the photos on page 129, turn the dough. Re-cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let rise until tripled in size, about 1 hour longer.

**5.** Top two large rimless (or inverted) baking sheets with parchment paper and dust the paper liberally with flour. Following the photos on page 126, turn the dough out onto a well-floured



Since the dough for Ciabatta Bread is very sticky, the key to manipulating it is to work quickly and gently.

counter, dust the top of the dough with flour, and divide the dough into 2 equal pieces with a wet dough scraper. Use well-floured hands and the dough scraper to transfer each piece of dough to a prepared baking sheet, folding the sides of the dough over the middle. Gently stretch each piece into a 10 by 5-inch rectangle with well floured hands. Mist the loaves with vegetable oil spray, cover loosely with plastic wrap, and let rise in a warm place until nearly doubled in size and the dough barely springs back when poked with a knuckle, 1 to 1½ hours.

**6.** Meanwhile, adjust an oven rack to the lowest position, place a baking stone on the rack, and heat the oven to 500 degrees. Let the baking stone heat for at least 30 minutes (but no longer than 1 hour).

**7.** Working with one of the loaves (keeping the other covered), spray lightly with water and carefully slide it onto the hot baking stone with the parchment. Bake for 20 minutes, then remove the bread from the oven and discard the parchment. Return the bread to the oven, bottom side up, and continue to bake until the center of the loaf registers 210 degrees on an

instant-read thermometer and the crust is deep golden brown, 15 to 20 minutes longer, rotating the loaf halfway through baking.

8. Transfer the loaf to a wire rack and repeat with the second loaf. Let the bread cool to room temperature (right side up), about 2 hours, before serving.

#### VARIATION

#### SAME-DAY CIABATTA BREAD

*If you don't have time for a sponge, this loaf can be made the same day, but the flavor won't be as complex.*

Omit the sponge. When assembling the dough in step 2, increase the amount of all-purpose flour to 6½ cups, increase the water to 3 cups, and increase the yeast to 1 envelope (2¼ teaspoons).

#### *Test Kitchen Tip:* BOTTOMS UP

During testing, we kept baking ciabatta with a perfect top crust and a soggy bottom crust. The problem? The parchment paper—essential for moving this super sticky dough into the oven—blocked the evaporation of the moisture, a problem that is unique to super-wet doughs. To fix this, we removed the parchment paper once the bread was set and beginning to brown, and flipped the bread upside down to dry out and darken on the bottom.

#### Is Tap Water OK?

Since bread has so few ingredients, the proportion and quality of each one matters greatly. Many professional bakers insist that the best bread is made with bottled water. Does it really matter? We tested several loaves of our Rustic Italian Bread (page 122) made with two bottled waters and tap water. The results might shock bakers everywhere, but no differences could be detected in the three loaves of bread. While we can't say with certainty that using water that is abjectly awful wouldn't make a difference in your baking, we can say that just about any potable water works. Keep in mind, though, that the quality of tap water can vary from season to season; if yours is particularly "fragrant" or "off," consider filtering it before use in recipes or uncapping some bottled water.

#### SHAPING CIABATTA BREAD



1. Using a wet dough scraper, quickly cut the dough into two equal pieces.



2. With one fluid motion, grasp one piece of dough with the dough scraper and the other end with your free hand (well dusted with flour) and gently lift the dough onto an inverted baking sheet covered with parchment paper.



3. Fold both sides of the dough over the center, like a business letter.



4. Gently stretch the dough out into a 10 by 5-inch rectangle with floured hands.

## BAGUETTES

MAKES 2 baguettes

Don't forget to reduce the oven temperature to 425 degrees immediately after putting the loaves in the oven. For a slow-rise baguette (made by letting the shaped loaf rise overnight) see the variation (page 128). If you don't have a standing mixer, see Hand-Mixing Method for Rustic Breads on page 122.

### SPONGE

- ½ cup (2¾ ounces) bread flour
- ½ cup warm water (110 degrees)
- ½ teaspoon instant or rapid-rise yeast

### DOUGH

- 3-3½ cups (16½ to 19¼ ounces) bread flour
- ¾ teaspoon instant or rapid-rise yeast
- 1½ cups warm water (110 degrees)
- 1½ teaspoons salt

### GLAZE

- 1 large egg beaten with 2 tablespoons water

**1. FOR THE SPONGE:** Stir all of the ingredients together in a medium bowl until combined. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit at room temperature until the sponge has risen and fallen (see page 119), at least 6 hours or up to 24 hours.

**2. FOR THE DOUGH:** Combine 3 cups of the flour and the yeast in a standing mixer fitted with the dough hook. With the mixer on low speed, add the water and mix until the dough comes together, about 2 minutes. Stop the mixer, cover the bowl with plastic wrap (no need to remove it from the mixer), and let sit at room temperature for 20 minutes.

**3.** Remove the plastic wrap, add the sponge and salt, and knead the dough on medium-low speed until it is smooth and elastic, about 8 minutes. If after 4 minutes more flour is needed, add the remaining ½ cup flour, 2 tablespoons at a time, until the dough clears the sides of the bowl, but sticks to the bottom (see page 97).

**4.** Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured counter and knead by hand to form a smooth, round ball. Place the dough in a large, lightly oiled bowl and cover tightly with greased plastic wrap. Let rise in a warm place until doubled in size, about 1 hour.



Baguettes do take some time to make since they require several risings, but the work can be easily spread out across several days.

**5.** Following the photos on page 129, turn the dough in the bowl with a dough scraper or large rubber spatula. Cover, let rise for 30 more minutes, then repeat the turning process. Cover and let rise until the dough has doubled in size, about 30 minutes longer.

**6.** Top a large rimless (or inverted) baking sheet with parchment paper. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured counter and divide it into 2 equal pieces. Following the photos on page 128, shape each piece of dough into a baguette and lay it seam side down on the prepared baking sheet,

### *Test Kitchen Tip:* GETTING IT RIGHT

We wanted to make a simple baguette recipe and found that there were just some things that couldn't be simplified. To get the right flavor we needed to use a sponge, and the longer it sat the better the flavor. Unlike many other rustic breads, baguettes cannot be baked at 500 degrees for any period of time or they form a crust before fully expanding. We tested baking them at several different temperatures and found that putting baguettes in a 500-degree oven and then immediately lowering the oven to 425 degrees gave us a perfectly crisp crust and moist crumb.

spaced about 5 inches apart. Mist the baguettes with vegetable oil spray, cover loosely with plastic wrap, and let rise in a warm place until nearly doubled in size and the dough barely springs back when poked with knuckle, 1 to 1½ hours.

**7.** Meanwhile, adjust an oven rack to the lower-middle position, place a baking stone on the rack, and heat the oven to 500 degrees. Let the baking stone heat for at least 30 minutes (but no longer than 1 hour).

**8. FOR THE GLAZE AND TO BAKE:** Score the top of the breads with a razor blade or sharp knife following the photo on page 130, cutting four ½-inch-deep slashes along the width of each baguette. Brush the breads with the egg-water mixture, then spray lightly with water. Carefully slide the breads and parchment onto the hot baking stone. Immediately reduce the oven temperature to 425 degrees and bake until the crust is deep golden brown and the center of the

bread registers 210 degrees on an instant-read thermometer, about 25 minutes, rotating the loaves halfway through baking.

**9.** Transfer the breads to a wire rack, discard the parchment, and let cool for about 30 minutes before serving.

#### VARIATION

#### SLOW-RISE BAGUETTES

*While it is convenient to be able to make a baguette in one day, if you have time, a long, slow overnight rising produces a more impressive loaf, richer in color with dramatic blistering and complex nutty flavors. Make sure that the plastic wrap covers the loaves completely but is loose enough to allow the baguettes to rise upward.*

In step 6, do not let the baguettes rise, but refrigerate them overnight or up to 12 hours. Let the baguettes sit at room temperature, covered, for 30 to 60 minutes while heating the baking stone, then bake as directed.

#### SHAPING BAGUETTES



**1.** Working with one piece of dough at a time, gently pat the dough into a rough 8 by 6-inch rectangle, with the long edge towards you.



**2.** Gently fold the bottom third of the dough up to the center and press to seal.



**3.** Gently fold the bottom of the dough up to the top and press to seal.



**4.** Using the side of your floured hand, create a large crease down the middle of the dough.



**5.** Working from one end of the loaf to the other, pinch the top and bottom of the dough together securely.



**6.** Gently roll the baguette back and forth to stretch it into an even 15-inch-long baguette, about 2½ inches wide. Roll the loaf seam side down and transfer to the parchment-lined baking sheet.



## Turning Dough

Most doughs are kneaded, left alone to rise, and then shaped. In some cases we add another step during the rising process called turning; that is, we delicately fold the dough over several times as it rises. Turning stretches the dough gently, building strength as any wayward sheets of gluten—the protein that gives bread structure once flour and water have been combined—are brought into alignment. This process works great for wet doughs, like ciabatta and Italian bread. It also works wonders for breads with all-white flour like baguettes and sourdough.



1. Slide a plastic bench scraper or rubber spatula under one side of the dough; gently lift and fold a third of the dough toward the center.



2. Repeat step 1 with the opposite side of the dough.



3. Finally, fold the dough in half, perpendicular to the first folds. The dough shape should be a rough square.

## DELI-STYLE RYE BREAD

MAKES 1 large loaf

*Don't forget to reduce the oven temperature immediately after putting the loaf in the oven. We prefer to use light or medium rye flour in this bread; tasters found dark rye flour overpowering. This loaf takes two days to make, but for a faster version, see the same-day variation on page 130; it will be slightly less flavorful but still very good. If you don't have a standing mixer, see Hand-Mixing Method for Rustic Breads on page 122.*

### SPONGE

- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup warm water (110 degrees)
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup (4 $\frac{1}{8}$  ounces) light or medium rye flour (see note above)
- $\frac{1}{4}$  cup (1 $\frac{1}{3}$  ounces) bread flour
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon instant or rapid-rise yeast

### DOUGH

- 3-3 $\frac{1}{2}$  cups (16 $\frac{1}{2}$  to 19 $\frac{1}{4}$  ounces) bread flour
- 1 cup (5 $\frac{1}{2}$  ounces) light or medium rye flour
- 1 tablespoon caraway seeds
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 tablespoon honey
- $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoons instant or rapid-rise yeast
- $\frac{1}{2}$  cups warm water (110 degrees)
- 2 teaspoons salt

### GLAZE

- 1 large egg beaten with 2 tablespoons water

**1. FOR THE SPONGE:** Stir all of the ingredients together in a medium bowl until combined. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit at room temperature until the sponge has risen and fallen (see page 119), at least 6 hours or up to 24 hours.

**2. FOR THE DOUGH:** Combine 3 cups of the bread flour, rye flour, caraway seeds, oil, honey, and yeast in a standing mixer fitted with the dough hook. With the mixer on low speed, add the water and mix until the dough comes together, about 2 minutes. Stop the mixer, cover the bowl with plastic wrap (no need to remove it from the mixer), and let sit at room temperature for 20 minutes.

**3.** Remove the plastic wrap, add the sponge and salt, and knead the dough on medium-low speed until it is smooth and elastic, about 8 minutes. If after 4 minutes more flour is needed, add the remaining  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup bread flour, 2 tablespoons at a time, until the dough clears the sides of the bowl, but sticks to the bottom (see page 97).

4. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured counter and knead by hand to form a smooth, round ball. Place the dough in a large, lightly oiled bowl and cover tightly with greased plastic wrap. Let rise in a warm place until doubled in size, 1 to 1½ hours.

5. Top a large rimless (or inverted) baking sheet with parchment paper. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured counter, press it into a 10-inch square without tearing it, and gently dimple it with your fingertips. Following the photos on page 124, fold the top corners into the middle of the dough, then gently roll and pinch the dough into a torpedo shape. Transfer to the prepared baking sheet, seam side down, and gently tuck the dough into a taut loaf. Mist the loaf with vegetable oil spray, cover loosely with plastic wrap, and let rise in a warm place until nearly doubled in size and the dough barely springs back when poked with a knuckle, 1 to 1½ hours.

6. Meanwhile, adjust an oven rack to the lower-middle position, place a baking stone on the rack, and heat the oven to 500 degrees. Let the baking stone heat for at least 30 minutes (but no longer than 1 hour).

7. **FOR THE GLAZE AND TO BAKE:** Score the top of the loaf with a razor blade or sharp knife following the photos below. Brush the loaf with the egg-water mixture, then spray lightly with water. Carefully slide the loaf and parchment onto the hot baking stone. Immediately reduce the oven temperature to 425 degrees and bake until the center of the loaf registers 210 degrees on an instant-read thermometer and the crust is deep golden brown, 35 to 40 minutes, rotating the loaf halfway through baking.

8. Transfer the loaf to a wire rack, discard the parchment, and let cool to room temperature, about 2 hours, before serving.

#### VARIATION

#### SAME-DAY DELI-STYLE RYE BREAD

*If you don't have time for a sponge, this loaf can be made the same day, but the flavor won't be as complex, and the crumb will be finer and more uniform (like sandwich bread).*

Omit the sponge. When assembling the dough in step 2, increase the amount of bread flour to ¾ cups, increase the rye flour to 1¼ cups, increase the water to 2¼ cups, and increase the yeast to 1 envelope (2¼ teaspoons).

## Scoring Rustic Breads

Rustic breads need to be scored because otherwise gas trapped inside will crack the top open in unwanted spots on your loaf. Also, scoring gives your bread an attractive and finished look. To make the scored design really stand out after the loaf is baked, lightly rub a little flour over the loaf before scoring. Round-shaped rustic breads, like Hearty Country Bread (page 118) present multiple scoring options, the most basic being the X and C designs below. Baguettes (page 127) because they are long and narrow, should be scored with four evenly spaced slashes across the width of the dough. Wider, torpedo-shaped loaves like Rustic Italian Bread (page 122) can be scored with three diagonal slashes across the top of the dough. When scoring, hold a razor blade or sharp knife at a 45-degree angle to get the most attractive opening, and make sure that you cut about ½ inch deep.

#### FOR ROUND-SHAPED RUSTIC BREADS:



Cut a large X about ½ inch deep into the top of the dough.



Cut a large C about ½ inch deep into the top of the dough.

#### FOR BAGUETTES:



Cut four ½-inch-deep slashes along the width of the dough.

#### FOR RUSTIC LOAVES:



Cut three ½-inch-deep diagonal slashes across the top of the dough.

## MY FIRST SOURDOUGH

**MAKES** 1 large round loaf

*Don't forget to reduce the oven temperature to 400 degrees immediately after putting the loaf in the oven. The sponge for this recipe requires at least 24 hours in order to develop a sour flavor, but can be left alone for up to 3 days; the longer the sponge sits during this time, the more sour flavor it will develop. Dried sourdough starter packets can be found in some natural foods stores and are readily available online (see page 132). If you don't have a standing mixer, see Hand-Mixing Method for Rustic Breads on page 122.*

### STARTER

- 1½ cups (8¼ ounces) bread flour**
- 1 cup warm water (110 degrees)**
- ½ teaspoon powdered sourdough starter (see note above)**

### DOUGH

- 3½-4 cups (19¼ to 22 ounces) bread flour**
- 1 teaspoon instant or rapid-rise yeast**
- 1½ cups warm water (110 degrees)**
- 2 teaspoons salt**

**1. FOR THE STARTER:** Stir all of the ingredients together in a medium bowl until combined. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit at room temperature until the sponge has risen and fallen (see page 119), at least 24 hours or up to 72 hours.

**2. FOR THE DOUGH:** Combine 3½ cups of the flour and the yeast in a standing mixer fitted with the dough hook. With the mixer on low speed, add the water and mix until the dough comes together, about 2 minutes. Stop the mixer, cover the bowl with plastic wrap (no need to remove it from the mixer), and let sit at room temperature for 20 minutes.

**3.** Remove the plastic wrap, add the sponge and salt, and knead the dough on medium-low speed until it is smooth and elastic, about 8 minutes. If after 4 minutes more flour is needed, add the remaining ½ cup flour, 2 tablespoons at a time, until the dough clears the sides of the bowl, but sticks to the bottom (see page 97).

**4.** Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured counter and knead by hand to form a smooth, round ball. Place the dough in a large, lightly oiled bowl and cover tightly with greased plastic

wrap. Let rise in a warm place until doubled in size, about 1 hour.

**5.** Following the photos on page 129, turn the dough in the bowl with a dough scraper or large rubber spatula. Cover, let rise for 30 more minutes, then repeat the turning process. Cover and let rise until the dough has doubled in size, about 30 minutes longer.

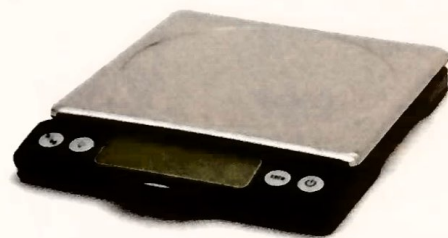
**6.** Top a large rimless (or inverted) baking sheet with parchment paper. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured counter, press it into a 10-inch square without tearing it, and gently dimple it with your fingertips. Following the photos on page 118, fold the bottom and top thirds of the dough over the middle. Tuck the sides underneath and gently round the dough with cupped hands. Place the loaf on the prepared baking sheet. Mist the loaf with vegetable oil spray, cover loosely with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for at least 8 hours or up to 24 hours.

**7.** Remove the loaf from the refrigerator and let sit, still covered, at room temperature for

### Testing: The Clear Choice for Accuracy

There are two basic types of kitchen scales: electronic and mechanical. We tested a handful of each and, as a group, the electronic scales were vastly preferred for their readability, precision, and weight range (from ¼ ounce to 10 pounds).

Our favorite electronic scale is the **OXO Digital Food Scale** (\$49.99). Testers found this scale exceptionally intuitive to use. With easy-to-read buttons and an optional backlight, the display can be pulled out from the body of the scale when weighing bulky items. It also features a large removable platform for easy cleaning.



1½ hours. Meanwhile, adjust an oven rack to the lower-middle position, place a baking stone on the rack, and heat the oven to 500 degrees. Let the baking stone heat for at least 30 minutes (but no longer than 1 hour).

8. Score the top of the loaf with a razor blade or sharp knife following the photos on page 130 and spray the loaf lightly with water. Carefully slide the loaf and parchment onto the hot baking stone. Reduce the oven temperature to 400 degrees and bake the bread until the center of the loaf registers 210 degrees on an instant-read thermometer and the crust is deep golden brown, 30 to 35 minutes, rotating the loaf halfway through baking.

9. Transfer the loaf to a wire rack, discard the parchment, and let cool to room temperature, about 2 hours, before serving.

### *Test Kitchen Tip:* MAKING IT SOUR

Sourdough starter is what sets this bread apart, but making this from scratch takes weeks (and isn't foolproof). A sourdough starter is a simple mix of flour and water, but for it to work, the flour and water must spend weeks, not hours or days, together. During this long holding time, wild yeast and bacteria—both of which give the starter (and eventually the sourdough bread made from the starter) its characteristic sour flavor—break down starches in the flour and feed on the resulting sugars. By-products of this process are carbon dioxide and alcohol, which cause the dough to rise and develop flavor. To speed things up and make it easier, we used a dehydrated sourdough starter and added bread flour and water. But we kept baking up sourdough bread that was only mildly sour and while many tasters enjoyed it that way, others wanted a stronger sour punch. We tried adding more starter powder to the dough but got little additional sour flavor. The key to making the bread more sour tasting was to let the rehydrated starter ferment for at least 24 hours. The one-day starter made bread with light sour notes, and the three-day starter made bread packed with sour flavor.

## Our Favorite Dried Sourdough Starter

To speed up our sourdough bread, we use powdered sourdough starter. You can find Goldrush Sourdough Starter at multiple sites online including Marie Callender's site ([www.mccornbread.com](http://www.mccornbread.com)). You will find Lalvain LA-4 Sourdough Starter at *The Baker's Catalogue* ([www.kingarthurfLOUR.com](http://www.kingarthurfLOUR.com)).



Goldrush Sourdough Starter



Lalvain LA-4 Sourdough Starter

### Testing: Mixers with Muscle

If you plan on baking bread with any frequency, a standing mixer will be invaluable. It makes mixing easy and kneading a breeze. Our favorite standing mixer is the **Cuisinart 5.5-Quart Standing Mixer**, left (\$349), which, in addition to being extremely powerful and effective, comes with a host of modern luxuries including a digital countdown timer with automatic shutoff and a feed tube—fitted splashguard. That said, if you're looking for a good standing mixer but need less muscle and want to spend far less money, we recommend the **KitchenAid Classic Plus Standing Mixer**, right (\$199), which features a 4.5-quart bowl, enameled metal dough hook and paddle, and metal whisk. While not as powerful as more expensive models, it aced our tests and testers praised its “intuitive” controls and “solid” feel.

