

How To: No Work Bread on FECAL FACE DOT COM

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As a native San Franciscan, it's safe to say that here, certain cultural ideals express themselves as shared variations on a common culinary theme. In this microcosm, you don't have to be Alice Waters's kid to have grown up eating homemade this and organic that. The kitchen of my childhood was dictated by a simple but steadfast credence: know what you're eating, know how to prepare it and enjoy the preparation as much as the end result. It's of this tradition that I bring you the first in a series of culinary how-to's.

I'm of the school of thought that just about any recipe provides occasion for experimentation - in the kitchen you can be as controlled or as creative as you choose. That said, it's good to know the ropes of some basics and what better to start with than bread. I stumbled on the below "no work" bread recipe a few months back and it's winning combination of golden crust, light yeasty flavor and zero required skill level has quickly positioned it as a staple in our home. Make it and see for yourself (and listen to the crust crackle as it comes out of the oven).



No Work Bread (Jim Lahey, Sullivan Street Bakery, NYC):

Ingredients

- 4 cups all-purpose or bread flour, plus flour for dusting
- 1/2 tsp scant dry active yeast
- 2 tsp salt
- 2 cups water at 70-80 F
- 2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil
- cornmeal/semolin, as needed



Combine the flour, yeast, and salt in a large bowl. Add the water and stir until blended. The dough will be sticky and that's how it should be (add a little more water if it seems dry).





Transfer the dough to another bowl greased with extra virgin olive oil, and turn the dough to coat with oil.



Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and leave in warm place. Make note of the time and let rest for about 18 hours at about 70 F.



Your dough will look something like this after about an hour...



...and will be bubbly and springy after some 18 hours of rising.



Next, lightly flour a work surface, remove the dough and fold once or twice; it will be soft, but once sprinkled with flour, not terribly sticky. Cover loosely with plastic wrap, and let rest for about 15 minutes.



Using just enough flour to keep the dough from sticking, gently and quickly shape the dough into a ball. Generously coat a cotton (not terry cloth) towel with cornmeal. Put the dough seam down on the towel and dust with more flour or cornmeal. Cover with another cotton towel (or plastic wrap) and let rise for about 2 hours. I generally lift the whole ball, towel and all into a bowl for this second rise to help maintain the loaf shape.



In about 2 hours, when it's ready, the dough will be more than doubled in size and won't spring back readily when poked with your finger.



At least half hour before the dough is ready, heat the oven to 450 F. Put a 3-to-4 quart covered pot (with the cover)- it may be cast-iron, enamel, pyrex, or ceramic- in the oven as it heats. When the dough is ready, carefully remove the pot from the oven and turn the dough over into the pot, seam side up. - It's messy, and it probably won't fall in artfully, but it will straighten out as it bakes.



Cover with the lid and bake for 30 minutes, then remove the lid and bake for another 20-30 minutes, until the loaf is beautifully browned. (If you feel the bread is scorching, lower the temperature.)



Let the bread cool for at least 30 minutes before slicing. Enjoy!

***Get creative and add olives, nuts, dried berries or cheese. Fold additions into the dough just before the second rise.

