



Italian Bread (Monkey Bread Style)

I like fresh bread. I like how it makes the house smell when it's proofing and cooking. This is a treatment on how to make Italian bread, but with enough detail that you'll understand to flex to French bread. I make it Monkey Bread style (pull apart) for fun, but you can make it in any form factor you want.

Ingredients

2 ½ to 3 ½ cups All Purpose flour
1 ¼ cups hot tap water
1 package Active Dry or Rapid Rise yeast
2 tsp sugar
1 T Extra Virgin Olive Oil
1 egg
1 T Kosher salt
1 T dried oregano
Cooking spray

Bloom Yeast: In a 2 cup measuring cup, combine hot tap water, yeast and sugar (skip the sugar if making French bread, expect longer proofing times). Stir to combine. Let sit for at least 5 minutes.

Prep the mixer: Put your dough hook on your mixer. Put 2 cups of the flour in the bowl. Add the olive oil (skip the olive oil if making French bread). With mixer on lowest speed, mix to combine.

Add the yeast mixture: Pour the yeast mixture into the mixing bowl. Use a bit of warm tap water to get the rest of the yeast out of the measuring cup and add to the mixing bowl. If a pool forms in the mixer, stop it and scrape down the side. Return to mixing at lowest speed.

Add “just enough” flour: I really do recommend watching the video for this part. Start with a quarter cup of flour, add it to the mixing bowl. Wait until the flour is incorporated (about 2 minutes). If the dough is not completely on the dough hook, add another quarter cup of flour and wait for it to become completely incorporated. You will eventually see “most” of the dough on the hook and a disk of dough stuck to the bottom of the bowl. At this point add a small amount of flour (like half or third of your ¼ measure) and wait for it to incorporate. Eventually, the disc of dough on the bottom of the bowl will be “pulled” up into the dough on the hook. When that happens, you've added enough flour.

Proof 1: Move the dough to a lightly lubricated bowl. Cover with foil, plastic wrap, or slightly damp towel. Use the proofing function of your oven for faster rise. If proofing on a counter, do not have the bowl sitting on metal or stone surface. Place on a towel or wooden cutting board. Allow to sit until dough triples in size. Expect between 1 and 3 hours for this.

Punch Down/Proof 2: Pull the dough off the sides of the container back to the center. This will release gas, and should become about half the size. Cover again and allow to proof a second time. Allow to sit until dough doubles in size. Expect 1-2 hours.

Shape/Proof 3: Tear off enough dough to roll into 1 ½ ball. Place in lightly lubricated baking pan (like a cake pan, spring form, etc.). Repeat until all the dough has been placed in the baking pan. Cover and let sit for 30 minutes.

Treat the surface/Bake: Beat the egg lightly with a fork. Brush the surface of the bread with the egg wash. Cover the entire surface. Sprinkle on the oregano and kosher salt. (Brush with warm water if making French bread, and also don't add the oregano or kosher salt). Bake at 370F for 30 minutes.

Rest: Remove from baking dish and place on cooling rack for at least 10 minutes before pulling (or cutting) into the bread.

Alternative form factors

1. Traditional loaf: Form into loaf about 12 inches long. Dust a baking sheet lightly with cornmeal. Place loaf on baking sheet, and bake at 370F for 30 minutes. Loaf will spread laterally during baking.
2. Loaf pan: Lightly lubricate loaf pan. Form into loaf that fits (typically 9 by 4 inches). Bake at 370F for 30 minutes. Done as French bread makes an excellent base for French Toast!
3. Ramekins: Lightly lubricate ramekins. Place about 1/6th of the dough in each ramekin. Bake at 370 for 25 minutes. You'll end up with rolls are great for barbeque or burgers.

Suggested Dips

1. Combine 2T melted butter, 2T extra virgin olive oil, and a pinch or two of kosher (or sea) salt. Mix to combine. It'll remind you of a dipping sauce you get from a pizza takeout place.
2. Hummus
3. Put about 4 ounces of crumbled feta cheese in a blender, food processor or mixing bowl (to use an emersion blender). Drizzle in extra virgin olive oil until creamy and spreadable. Add a touch of hot sauce if you're feeling it.