

Our Favorite Never Fail Recipe for Buns or Sandwich Bread

Ingredients

- 1 egg plus enough warm water to equal 1 1/3 cups
- 1/4 cup melted butter
- 1/4 cup sugar
- 1 1/2 teaspoon sea salt
- 4 cups bread flour
- 1 1/2 teaspoon instant yeast/bread machine yeast or 2 teaspoons active dry yeast

Directions

Place all ingredients except flour in a mixer or large bowl. Mix thoroughly.

Note: If using active dry yeast, add the yeast to the warm water and allow it to warm and dissolve following directions on yeast package before adding the rest of the ingredients.

Add flour one cup at a time, mixing well after each addition. (You may need to adjust the amount of flour based on humidity conditions.)

For those using a mixer – when bread has reached desired stiffness, mix for 6-8 minutes, until ingredients are well mixed and gluten has had a chance to develop.

If mixing by hand, when dough is stiff enough, dump onto a well-floured counter and knead for 5-10 minutes.

Cover and let rise for 20 minutes. Punch down dough, let rise until double in size.

Divide dough into desired number of buns and loaves and shape accordingly. Place dough onto well-greased pans.

Remember, the bread will rise again and double in size, so small buns will get much larger. When making hamburger buns, I make them about 2 inches across, and then flatten them slightly before letting them rise.

Cover with a clean dish cloth and place in a warm location until it doubles in size.

Bake buns around 15 minutes at 350F, until lightly browned. Bake bread at 350F for around 25-30 minutes.

Cool on wire rack before slicing.

Bread Baking Troubleshooting Guide and Commonly Asked Questions

*Excerpted from “Never Buy Bread Again – 20+ Homemade Bread Recipes” by Laurie
Neverman of Common Sense Homesteading*

What flour should I use to make bread?

This may seem obvious to some, but **bread flour is the preferred flour for making bread**. Why use bread flour and not all purpose flour? (I mean, it says “all purpose”, right? Bread is a purpose.) Bread flour has a higher gluten (protein) content. Gluten gives standard yeast breads wonderful stretchiness to their dough, to trap those beautiful burping yeast bubbles so your bread rises to blissful heights. Gluten is what I miss most in gluten free baking.

Brands do make a difference. My personal favorite flour is King Arthur. It has always given me excellent results. I can't get buy King Arthur in bulk through my buying club, so right now I'm using organic Golden Buffalo flour from Heartland Mill. Golden Buffalo is a high protein wheat flour that has the coarsest flakes of bran removed, leaving the finer bran and germ behind. It's like “whole wheat light”.

If you're buying wheat berries to grind for bread flour, look for ones that are labeled “hard wheat”. The hard wheat varieties are the ones that have higher gluten content. I generally use a hard white, but hard red spring wheat gives a nice, somewhat nutty flavor to the bread and is also very good. Most of the older grain varieties like Einkorn and Kamut® contain less gluten, so you may want to wait to experiment with them until after you've mastered bread with high gluten flour.



How Warm Should the Water Be That I Add to the Bread Dough?

Think baby's bath water. If you would scald your behind dipping it in the water, it's too hot. The cookbook that comes with my bread machine asks for 80° F(26.7° C) water. I've seen other recommendations that go as high as 120 – 130° F. Much higher than that, and you're getting into dangerous, yeast killing territory. ([140°F \(60° C\)= dead yeast.](#)) **I aim for around 90-100° F (32 – 38°C) water (or other liquid) to activate the yeast.** If you don't know how hot that is, get

an inexpensive kitchen thermometer to help. If your yeast is happy, you should see bubbles start to form in your proofing water and in the beginning stages of dough making.

Which Yeast Should I Use to Make Bread?

You'll find several types of yeast in the baking aisle. (*Don't use wine yeast to make bread, or bread yeast to make wine. They are different strains of yeast.*) They may stock fresh yeast, active dry yeast and instant yeast. **Active dry yeast and instant yeast are most commonly used.**

Many recipes call for **active dry yeast, which must be proofed (dissolved in warm liquid) before you mix in the rest of the ingredients.** If you don't proof your active dry yeast, you don't give it a chance to dissolve properly, so the bread may be gritty, and you don't give the yeast beasts a chance to wake up, so the bread will not rise well.

Quick rise, instant or bread machine yeast is made up of finer grains, and can be used directly in a recipe without being proofed. This makes it a time saver because you don't have to wait for the yeast to wake up. It is recommended for use in bread machines. I normally use SAF-INSTANT yeast when I'm not making sourdough.

Fresh yeast must be kept refrigerated and spoils quickly. It comes in little rectangular patties and looks like tan toothpaste.

How much yeast is in a package?

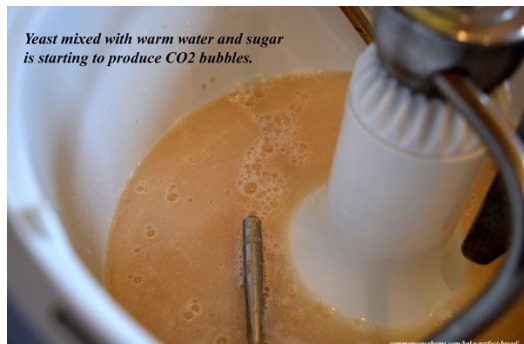
1 package active dry yeast = about 2 1/4 teaspoons = 1/4 ounce

1 (.6-ounce) cube or cake of compressed yeast (also know as fresh yeast) = 1 package of active dry yeast

1 envelope or packet of instant yeast = 2 1/4 teaspoons = 1/4 ounce

1 (6-ounce) cube or cake of compressed yeast = 1-1/2 to 2 teaspoons instant yeast

Substitution: To substitute instant or bread machine yeast for active dry yeast, use 25% less instant yeast than active dry.



Yeast mixed with warm water and sugar is starting to produce CO2 bubbles.

How Warm Should My Bread be to Rise?

For your bread to rise, or proof, it helps if it's warm, but not too warm. With healthy yeast, bread will even rise in the refrigerator – it just rises really slowly. Just check out any of those “5 minutes per day” bread recipes where they keep a tub of dough in the fridge. The fridge dough will have bubbles.



After the first cup of flour has been added, bubbles start to reform as soon as the mixing stops.

Most of us would like to bake the bread the same day we mix it up, so a little warmth is helpful. Remember, don't go over 140° F (60° C) or you'll kill the yeast.

For the first rise or bulk proof, aim for around 75 – 85° F (24 -29° C).

For the second rise or final proof of the shaped loaves, aim for around 90-100°

F (32 – 38°C).

Temperatures that are too warm will yield flopped or flattened bread as the yeast pumps out gas faster than the gluten can stretch and organize to create a lovely domed bread structure. Slowing down the ferment a little also develops a better flavor in the bread. This is one of the reasons homemade bread often tastes richer than mass produced commercial breads, which are all about speed. [SeriousEats.com recommends a rise time of roughly two hours](https://www.seriouseats.com/recipes/2012/02/serious-eats-bread-recipe.html) for a good balance of flavor and texture.

The bulk rise is done in a lightly covered container in a warm area until the bread has roughly doubled in size.



My Bread Didn't Rise – What Did I Do Wrong?

If you have the right temperature ranges listed above and your bread still won't rise, there may be a problem with your yeast. Remember, **active dry yeast needs to proof in warm liquid for 10-15 minutes before adding it to the rest of the ingredients.** You can mix your sugar into your proofing water to help jump start the process if you like. Yeasts like to eat sugars.

If your temperatures are correct and you proofed your yeast and it still isn't working, check the date on the yeast package. My mom had a friend call who tried to make mom's bun recipe, and the friend couldn't get it to rise. They talked over what had been done and couldn't find a problem – until they checked the date on the yeast. It had expired 7 years ago! The tiny grocery store in my home town didn't do a ton of business, and I guess that product sat on the shelf much longer than it should have.

My Dough is Too Sticky – Can I Fix it?

Many recipes for the home bread baker are measured by volume (cups, tablespoons, etc.) because it's convenient. The problem is that flour can readily absorb moisture depending on the humidity levels. Also, different types of flour will naturally contain more or less moisture and behave differently. This means that even if you follow a recipe exactly, your dough may turn out too sticky or too hard. For example, freshly ground flour tends to have a higher moisture content, and in my experience always makes a sticky dough. The Golden Buffalo flour I've been baking with tends to be very dry, and I usually end up using only 2/3 to 3/4 of the flour that I would typically use for a loaf of bread or it turns into a brick.

If your dough is too sticky, you can usually fix it by kneading in extra flour a little bit at a time until the right consistency is reached. Conversely, **if your dough is too stiff and dry**, you can knead in more water, around 1-2 tablespoons at a time, until it softens up. Don't add a lot of water at once, or you'll make a sticky, sloppy mess. As I mentioned, some flours will naturally be more sticky than others. Standard, good quality commercial bread flour will be the easiest to work with and less likely to make a sticky dough.

My Bread Dough Smells Sour, Like Beer or Alcohol – What Happened and is it Safe to Eat?

When yeast breads rise too long, they "over-proof". Alcohol is a natural by product of yeast, along with carbon dioxide. More fermenting equals more alcohol. They should still be safe to bake and eat. The texture and flavor will be different, but the alcohol should be driven off by the heat of baking.

My Bread is Too Dense – I Baked a Brick – How Can I Bake Lighter Bread?

To go from brick making to bread baking, start with the right ingredients. With experience, you can work with different ingredients more easily, but for the beginning baker, keeping things simple produces more consistent results.

- White bread flour will make a lighter loaf than whole wheat flour. Start with white bread flour and gradually add more whole wheat flour until you get a mix that works for you.
- Make sure your water is warm and of medium softness. [Red Star Yeast](#) notes that, "Too hard or too soft water, as well as water high in fluoride or chlorine, will result in short, stubby loaves." Use filtered or bottled water if you have any of these problems.
- Make sure your yeast is fresh and active. Proof active dry yeast.

Make sure you knead the dough enough to develop the gluten, which will give structure to the bread so it traps the air bubbles inside. This means kneading at least 6-8 minutes

by machine or 10-12 minutes by hand. For whole wheat flour, more kneading may be required. You'll know that you've kneaded the dough enough when it starts to develop good elasticity and an almost satiny feel. White bread flour based dough should hold up to the window pane test where you can stretch a thin membrane of dough between your fingers. Whole wheat bread dough should still be stretchy, even if you can't quite form a thin membrane.



Is it Possible to Knead Bread Too Much?

If you're mixing by hand, it's pretty unlikely that you will overmix/knead your bread too much. If you're using a mixer, overkneading is more of a possibility. Don't crank your mixer on high and walk away. I always use a low setting on my [Bosch Universal Kitchen Machine](#) to knead bread. (I upgraded to the Bosch after killing three bread machines. Over ten years and it's still going strong.) Follow the manufacturer's instructions for your machine. Turning a heavy duty electric mixer up on high and leaving it may cause the dough to overheat and start breaking down the structure of the dough.

My Bread Looked Perfect Going Into the Oven – and Then it Collapsed

This may sound a little strange, but you want to put your bread in the oven *before* it looks perfect. Bread will rise a little in the oven as it bakes, so you want to get it baking when it's just a little smaller than you expect the finished loaf to be. **If your bread has risen too far when it goes in, odds are it will fall a little (or a lot) during baking.**

Another possibility is that your dough is too wet. If it looks fine at the beginning of baking and then collapses, **try reducing the amount of liquid or adding a little more flour** the next time around. On the [King Arthur bread machine advice section](#),

they note: “Bread that rises, then collapses in the middle as it bakes — the infamous “crater bread” — contains too much liquid. Adjust your formula.”

Yet another reason your bread collapsed may get back to what I mentioned earlier about rising temperatures that are too warm. Remember, slow and steady on the rise gives the bread time to build a support structure to capture and hold the CO₂ from the yeast.

My Bread Didn't Brown – Is it Baked?

There can be a several reasons bread doesn't brown properly. Most commonly, the oven isn't heating right. Get an oven thermometer and make sure your oven is holding the correct temperature, and that your top heating element is working. If your bread has reached an internal temperature of 200° F (93° C), it's baked enough to eat, whether it brown or not.

If you are baking with steam to get a crackly crust, too much steam/moisture building up on the bread can prevent it from browning. Try using less steam.

On the flip side, if your bread is burning on the top before it's baked all the way through, try adjusting your oven temperature down. If you have your oven manual, some of them give options for resetting your temperature range. Otherwise, you can just note the difference and adjust recipes accordingly.

If your bottoms are getting too brown before your tops are done and your oven temperature is fine, you may want to invest in heavier bread pans and/or a baking stone. Stoneware loaf pans and baking stones hold and gently distribute the heat during baking to avoid hot spots and provide even browning. I invested in two Pampered Chef unglazed loaf pans many years ago and they are still holding up well to weekly use. There are also a variety of glazed stoneware loafs pans available, and glass loaf pans work well, too.

If Your Bread Flops, Don't Give Up!

If my teenage sons can manage to make a decent loaf of bread, you can, too. Use quality ingredients with a trusted recipe, and don't skimp on the kneading time. With practice you'll be creating beautiful loaves of fresh baked bread.

Get more troubleshooting tips, plus storage, freezing and par-baking instructions and our family's favorite recipes in my new book, “Never Buy Bread Again – 20+ Homemade Bread Recipes”.

Learn more at <http://commonsensehome.com/bread-book/>

