

Rustic Artisan Bread Recipe

Ingredients:

- 3 3/4 cups (450 g) all-purpose flour or bread flour
- 1 1/2 tsp salt
- 1 packet (2 1/4 tsp) traditional active dry yeast
- 1 1/2 cups (360 ml) warm water (110-115°F or 43-46°C)

Instructions:

1. Activate the Yeast:

- In a small bowl, mix the yeast with 1/4 cup of the warm water and a pinch of sugar (optional).
- Let it sit for 5-10 minutes until frothy.

2. Mix the Dough:

- In a large mixing bowl, combine the flour and salt.
- Add the yeast mixture and the remaining warm water.
- Stir with a wooden spoon or your hands until it forms a shaggy, sticky dough.

3. Knead the Dough:

- Transfer the dough to a floured surface and knead for about 8-10 minutes, until smooth and elastic.
- Alternatively, use a stand mixer with a dough hook for 5-6 minutes.

4. First Rise:

- Place the dough in a lightly oiled bowl, turning it to coat the surface with oil.
- Cover the bowl with a damp cloth or plastic wrap.
- Let it rise in a warm spot for 1-2 hours, or until it doubles in size.

5. Shape the Dough:

- Punch down the risen dough and transfer it to a floured surface.
- Shape it into a round loaf or an oblong loaf, depending on your preference.
- Place the shaped dough on a parchment-lined baking sheet or in a greased Dutch oven.

6. Second Rise:

- Cover the shaped dough with a damp cloth and let it rise again for 30-45 minutes, until puffy.

7. Bake the Bread:

- Preheat your oven to 450°F (230°C). If using a Dutch oven, place it in the oven to preheat.
- For a crisp crust, place a pan of water on the lower rack of the oven to create steam.
- If using a baking sheet, slash the top of the loaf with a sharp knife to allow it to expand as it bakes.
- Bake for 30-35 minutes, or until the crust is golden brown and the loaf sounds hollow when tapped on the bottom.

8. Cool Before Slicing:

- Let the bread cool on a wire rack for at least 20-30 minutes before slicing to allow the crumb to set.

Tips for Success:

- Make it extra rustic: Add herbs (like rosemary or thyme) or mix in seeds for added flavor and texture.
- Store leftovers: Wrap the bread in a clean towel or store in a paper bag for up to 2 days. For longer storage