

FORGET FLOWERS—BRING HER a loaf of homemade bread and she'll be soft, supple dough in your hands. It worked for Jim Lahey, owner of New York City's renowned Sullivan Street Bakery and Co. and the author of *My Bread* (and most recently, *My Pizza*). "I started making bread to impress my college sweetheart," he says. It happens to be surprisingly easy—if you use Lahey's no-knead method. Even better, Lahey promises. "You can knock this out of the park on the first try."

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

clean dish towel

4½- to 5½-quart heavy
ovenproof pot with lid

potholders

flat wire rack



1. Mix the dough

In a medium bowl, stir together 3 cups of bread flour, 1½ tsp of salt, and ¼ tsp of instant yeast. Add 1½ cups cool water and mix with a wooden spoon until you have a wet, sticky dough, about 30 seconds.

CHANGE IT UP

- For whole-wheat bread, reduce the bread flour to 2¼ cups and add ¾ cup of whole-wheat flour; increase the yeast to ½ tsp.
- For rye bread, reduce the bread flour to 2¼ cups and add ¾ cup of rye flour; increase the yeast to ½ tsp.
- For olive bread, add 1½ cups roughly chopped pitted kalamata olives (drained) to the flour and omit the salt. Increase the yeast to ¾ tsp and the water to 1½ cups.

2. START THE SLOW RISE

Cover the bowl and let the dough sit at room temperature until the surface is dotted with bubbles and the dough has more than doubled in size, 12 to 18 hours.

PLAN AHEAD Start the rise at night and you can bake in the morning.



3. Shape and finish the dough

Scrape the dough, which will be loose and sticky, onto a floured work surface. Lightly flour your hands and then lift the edges of the dough toward the center, nudging and tucking the edges to make it round. Place the dough, seam side down, on a clean, floured dish towel. If the dough feels tacky, dust it lightly with flour. Fold the towel loosely over it and place in a warm, draft-free spot to rise until it's almost doubled and holds an impression when poked with a finger, 1 to 2 hours.



4. PREHEAT THE POT

Half an hour before the end of the second rise, place a rack in the lower third of your oven and preheat the oven to 475°F. Set a covered 4½- to 5½-quart heavy pot (such as Le Creuset) in the center of the rack to heat up for 30 minutes.

5. Bake the bread

Using potholders, take the preheated pot out of the oven. Remove the lid. Unfold the towel, dust the dough lightly with flour, and quickly but gently invert the dough into the pot, seam side up. Cover the pot and bake the bread for 30 minutes. Then uncover and bake until it turns deep chestnut but isn't burnt, 15 to 30 minutes. Use potholders to carefully remove the bread from the pot; put it on a rack to cool thoroughly, at least 1 hour.

AN OVEN WITHIN THE OVEN

Baking the bread in a covered pot traps the steam, forming a good crust and moist crumb, Lahey says.



TIPS

Step 1: Mix
Use 1 1/2 or 1 5/8 cups of water.

Step 2: Slow rise
Let rise up to 24 hours.

Step 3: Forget the dish towel!
Lightly flour top of dough and cover loosely with saran wrap.

Cover entire bowl with a beach towel to prevent drafts.

IT ALWAYS WORKS!