

CIABATTA

(from The Italian Baker)

for biga:

1/8 tsp active dry yeast
1 cup + 1 Tbs water at room temperature
1 + 1/4 cup all purpose flour (165 g)

Dissolve yeast in water, add the flour and form a sticky dough. Leave it covered at room temperature for 16 to 24 hours.

for the final dough:

2.5 Tbs milk
1/2 tsp active dry yeast
5.5 ounces water (1/2 cup + 1.5 Tbs)
1/2 T olive oil
1 cup biga (250 g)
250 g all purpose flour
1/2 Tbs salt (7.5 g)

If kneading in a mixer, stir the yeast in the milk and let it stand for a couple of minutes in the bowl. Add the water, oil, biga, and mix to incorporate, dissolving the biga in the liquid. Add the flour and salt, and mix at low speed for a couple of minutes. Change to the dough hook and knead 2 minutes at low speed, and 2 minutes at medium speed. Finish kneading by hand on a well-floured surface, but adding as little extra flour as possible.

Place the dough in an oiled bowl, cover, and leave at room temperature for 1 hour and 15 minutes. Divide the dough, which will be very soft and bubbly, in two equal pieces. Place each half on a well floured piece of parchment paper, and shape each as a cylinder, keeping the seam side down. Stretch it gently to give the ciabatta overall shape (a rectangle of 10 x 4 inches), and use the tip of your fingers to make deep dimples all over the dough. Cover with a damp towel and let them rise for 1.5 to 2 hours.

Bake in a pre-heated 425 F oven, spraying the bread with water three times in the first 10 minutes. Total baking time should be 20 to 25 minutes. Cool the loaves on a rack.