

Fluffy Slippers

During lockdown fluffy slippers or slippers of some sort have been *de rigueur* as have attempts at baking sourdough bread. Post lockdown we may not have as much time for the rigors of maintaining our sourdough starters, so the less demanding ciabatta might be a way to keep the smell of freshly baked bread wafting from the kitchen. Ciabatta (meaning slipper in Italian) is a delightfully fluffy slipper of a loaf; it's full of air bubbles and the quite moist dough is tipped out from the proving bowl onto a baking tray, divided with a pastry scraper into two and coaxed into rough oval shoe-shapes with plenty of wriggle room. Maintaining the air bubbles is essential, so little handling or kneading is required, the moistness helping to develop the gluten. Ciabatta is a lovely bread for sandwiches, providing plenty of surface area for fillings, including barbecued or slow roasted meats. The next day ciabatta is great toasted.

Ciabatta

Starter

- 150 g bread flour
- 1/2 tsp freeze-dried yeast
- 120 ml water
- 3 tbs milk

Mix the yeast with the water and milk in a large ceramic bowl. Add the flour and mix well with a spoon. Cover with plastic wrap with a small air hole or use a clean tea towel and leave in a warm place to start the yeast growing. Leave overnight at room temperature.

The bread dough

- 350 g bread flour

- 1 tsp salt
- 250 ml water
- 1 tbs olive oil
- 1/2 tsp yeast
- flour for dusting

Add the salt into the flour and stir with a spatula or wooden spoon. Mix the liquids with the yeast and add to the starter mix which should be full of bubbles and well risen. Mix together and then stir in the flour. Stir for a few minutes as a rudimentary kneading process, cover the bowl and place in a warm position for three hours. The dough should rise to the top of the bowl. Cover a baking sheet with baking paper. Dust the risen dough well with flour and using a spatula scrape it out onto the sheet. Using a pastry scraper divide the dough into two and roughly shape into ovals by tucking the dough around the sides without depressing the dough and losing the air bubbles. Alternatively, divide the dough into four or six smaller slippers. Cover and leave for prove for 15 minutes and meanwhile preheat the oven to 220°C. Bake the loaves for 20-25 minutes.



Ciabatta loaves proofing before baking.