



THE MILLENNIAL COOK
FARIHA AMBER



The art of bread baking

Baking is often therapeutic. Dare I say, bread baking is also addictive!

Those who have tried their hand in bread baking can surely resonate with the above statements. As for those who have not, I suggest you give it a go. Even if a kitchen fail occurs, rest assured the procedure would at least calm your mind.

The entire process of bread baking is so beautiful, and although it may take several hours to make at home, the result is worth it as there is no aroma better than the smell of freshly baked goodies in my accord!

There is something utterly satisfying about kneading the soft dough and giving it time to rest for as long as it requires, then finally watching it rise beautifully in the oven — a true labour of love. Fear not, because time is the only complex element in this elaborate process.

Bread also happens to be a quintessential staple all over the world, and thus, several countries have their own type of breads that are representatives of the country. Thus, here are four bread recipes handpicked from around the world for you to savour.

ITALIAN CIABATTA

This soft and tender bread is infamous for being hard to make at home. If you think likewise and the thought of baking ciabatta at home intimidates you, then this recipe shall be your ultimate saviour! It requires

only a handful of pantry ingredients and if followed correctly, you shall master the art of bread baking in no time.

Originating in Italy, ciabatta is best enjoyed with a drizzle of pure extra virgin olive oil, a light sprinkling of salt and freshly sliced tomatoes. To enhance the flavour even further, you can rub a slice of garlic on the slices of bread. Ciabatta also makes a great base for bruschetta or crostini topped with juicy tomatoes, olives, and basil.

Ingredients

2½ cups bread flour
2 tsp instant yeast
1 tsp salt
3 tbsp olive oil
1¼ cup lukewarm water

Method

Drop the yeast in one cup of water and leave it for 10 minutes in order to activate. In a large bowl, add flour, salt, and a couple tablespoons of olive oil and mix to combine. Add in the yeast and water mixture into the bowl and start stirring everything with a wooden spoon.

As the dough comes together, start

mixing with your hands. This tends to be very sticky so you may oil your palms. Add the remaining water in little amounts as you go. Stretch the dough, drop it back and then push it against you with the help of your palm. Be careful about not tearing the dough and continue kneading for 8–10 minutes.

Once done, the dough should be incredibly light and soft. Slip in the prepared dough into a greased bowl. Cover this and leave it to proof for two hours in a warm place. After two hours, the dough should triple in size. Place the dough on a floured surface and lightly stretch it to a slender rectangle. Slice the rectangle in half lengthwise and cover it again for 15 minutes.

At this point, preheat your oven at 170°C and line a baking tray with parchment paper. Gently place the slices of dough on it and bake them separately for approximately 20 minutes. Once done, allow them to cool slightly, just enough to cut through and enjoy while still warm with your favourite toppings!