

Don't live without it

What do most people on a special diet have in common? They never take a piece of good bread for granted.

Before going gluten and dairy free, if you had asked what I'd choose if I could eat just one food for the rest of my life, it would have been bread. The staff of life! I loved bread in every form—crispy French baguettes, hot yeasty rolls, soft white sandwich bread, hearty crusty brown bread. Toast. Croutons. Crumbs. You name it. I savored the luscious aroma, the texture, the taste. Bread was my go-to fare.

Imagine my dismay when my favorite food suddenly topped my doctor's list of no-no's. It was then I decided that you can't keep a good chef down.

I marched into the kitchen and started experimenting with gluten-free flours and alternative ingredients for dairy and eggs. Admittedly, the first few results were dismal. But I knew the tide had turned when I handed my sister, who's a celiac, one of my French baguettes. She gobbled it down, with rave reviews.

Now my favorite activities are baking bread and eating it. And sharing it! Try these all-time favorite recipes, some created by me and others by cookbook author and baking instructor Rebecca Reilly, and enjoy your own delicious and bountiful bonanza of gluten-free, dairy-free breads.

French Baguette

MAKES 2 BAGUETTES

This bread is best when eaten within two days. To crisp and freshen, place the bread in a preheated oven (350 degrees) for 5 minutes. It will keep up to two months in the freezer. Wrap it tightly in plastic wrap and again in foil. Modified slightly, this recipe also makes French Boule (shown on our cover) and Crusty Dinner Rolls.

- 3 cups gluten-free high-protein flour blend (page 62)
- 2 teaspoons xanthan gum
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 3 tablespoons sugar*
- 1 tablespoon active dry yeast
- 1-2 teaspoons dried rosemary or dill or herb of choice, optional
- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1½ cups warm water
- Rice flour or cornmeal for dusting

1. Grease or lightly spray a double French bread pan and dust with white rice flour or cornmeal.

2. Sift first 4 ingredients into a large mixing bowl. Add yeast and herbs. Mix to incorporate ingredients.

3. Blend olive oil and warm water (110-120 degrees) into dry ingredients and mix on high speed for 4 minutes.

4. Spoon half the dough into each loaf pan, spreading dough into the shape of a French loaf. (The dough won't fill the length of the pan. It should be approximately 10 to 12 inches long.)

5. Place a clean kitchen towel over the dough and place it in a warm area to rise for approximately 35 minutes. The middle of each loaf should rise to the top of the pan and be double its original size.

6. Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

7. Bake bread in the lower third of preheated oven for 30 for 35 minutes. After the first 20 minutes, check the bread for browning. If it's well browned, cover it loosely with a piece of aluminum foil. When finished, bread sounds hollow when tapped and registers 200 to 220 degrees on an instant read thermometer.

Each ¼ baguette contains:

254 calories, 3g total fat, 0g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 0mg cholesterol, 52g carbohydrate, 301mg sodium, 3g fiber, 5g protein

High-Protein Flour Blend

This nutritious blend works best in baked goods that require elasticity, such as wraps and pie crusts.

- 1 ¼ cups bean flour (your choice), chickpea flour or soy flour
- 1 cup arrowroot starch, cornstarch or potato starch
- 1 cup tapioca starch/flour
- 1 cup white or brown rice flour

Top Bread-making Tips

Follow these simple suggestions to create a perfect loaf.

1. Crunchy Crust

For traditional baguette crust, place a small ovenproof bowl with approximately ½ to 1 cup warm water on the lowest rack in preheated oven. Bake bread in the lower third of the oven. After bread has baked for 15 minutes, carefully remove the bowl.

2. Herbal Alternatives

Vary the flavor of your bread by adding different dried or fresh chopped herbs or fresh minced garlic to the dough.

3. Viva Italia!

For crunch and flavor reminiscent of traditional Italian bread, dust your bread pan with cornmeal before adding the dough.

4. Shiny Top

For a shinier crust, brush the top of a just-baked loaf with a little olive oil. Return loaf to oven and bake an additional 3 to 5 minutes.

5. Finishing Touch

For a crustier bottom, remove the loaf from the pan after baking and place it directly on the oven rack to bake for an additional 3 to 5 minutes.