

Inside the Jewish Bakery: Bagels, Rolls & Bialys

Stanley Ginsberg and Norman Berg

From “Bagels”

How to Shape a Bagel

One of the defining characteristics of a proper New York water bagel is its chewiness, which comes, in part, from the long chains of gluten that are formed when the dough is rolled into a strand and joined together in a circle—like a snake biting its tail. For a lot of people, however, getting those dough rings uniform and well sealed so that they don't come apart in the kettle poses a real challenge. As a result, several approaches to shaping bagels have emerged.

The easiest approach is dividing the dough into 3 oz./85 g. balls, sticking a finger through the middle and stretching the dough into the requisite shape. That's simple enough, except for two problems: first, unless the dough has been allowed to relax sufficiently, it will almost certainly come together and close the hole as it expands in the kettle and the oven; second, it won't have that characteristic chewiness because rolling and piercing will not produce the long gluten strands that rolling and sealing do.

To roll and seal, divide and weigh out the dough, roll each piece into a thick log, letting it rest for 10 minutes or so, then stretch it out to form a circle and seal the ends by overlapping and rolling them against the work surface.

1. Divide the dough into a thick log and let it rest for 15 to 20 minutes to relax the gluten. Cut the log in half for easy handling and roll the dough into a strand about 8 to 10 in./20 to 25 cm. long and as thick as your thumb.



2. Wrap it around your knuckles and break it with your thumbnail, leaving about a 1 in./2.5 cm overlap.



3. Roll the overlapped ends against your work surface to seal.



4. Arrange the shaped bagels on cornmeal-dusted or parchment-lined baking sheets or proofing boards, cover well with plastic and chill overnight.



The pros used a variation of the second method that eliminated dividing and weighing the dough. They'd simply cut a slab of dough into long strips 1 ½ to 2 in./4 to 5 cm. square, roll the first 6 in./15 cm. into a cylinder with their left hand (if they were righties) and, with their right hands, stretch the dough to 12 in./30 cm. or so, wrap it around their knuckles, break the circle off with their right thumbnail and roll it to seal—all in one smooth motion. An experienced bagel man could produce upwards of 20 bagels a minute; that's 100 dozen bagels an hour. (For a step-by-step instructional video on shaping bagels like the pros, visit www.ny-bakers.com.)

From “Bialystoker Kuchen (Bialys)”

Bialys



Bialys never caught on outside of
New York.

Makes a dozen 3 oz./85 g. kuchen

INGREDIENT: Artisan flour

VOLUME: 5 cups

OUNCES: 24.0

GRAMS: 680

BAKER'S PERCENTAGE: 100.0%

INGREDIENT: Ice water

VOLUME: 1½ cups

OUNCES: 13.0

GRAMS: 370

BAKER'S PERCENTAGE: 54.0%

INGREDIENT: Instant yeast

VOLUME: 1 tsp.

OUNCES: 0.1

GRAMS: 4

BAKER'S PERCENTAGE: 0.6%

INGREDIENT: Salt

VOLUME: 2¼ tsp.

OUNCES: 0.5

GRAMS: 14

BAKER'S PERCENTAGE: 2.0%

*Use 1 tsp. Onion filling I, II or III for each kuchen.

1. Combine the flour, salt and yeast in a bowl and blend using a whisk or the paddle attachment at low (KA 1) speed. Add water and continue blending until the ingredients are evenly blended and the dough forms a shaggy mass, about 1 minute.
2. If kneading by machine: switch to the dough hook and continue kneading for 10 to 12 minutes until the dough is smooth and elastic and stretches when pinched and pulled. Turn the dough onto a well-floured work surface and knead by hand for 30 to 60 seconds. If kneading by hand: turn the dough onto a well-floured work surface and knead until the dough is smooth and elastic and stretches when pinched and pulled, about 12 to 15 minutes.
3. Turn the dough onto your work surface—it will be firm enough so that no additional flour is necessary—and knead for a minute or two. Shape the dough into a ball and turn into a bowl. Cover with plastic wrap and ferment until more than doubled in bulk, 2 to 3 hours.
4. Turn the risen dough onto your work surface, degas gently and divide into a dozen 3 oz./85 g. pieces. Form each into a ball. Arrange the dough balls on a parchment-covered sheet and cover with plastic wrap. Let proof until the rolls have doubled in volume and the dough feels as though it's about to collapse when a finger is pressed gently into the surface, about 1 to 1 ½ hours. Anything less will cause the shaped bialys to blow up into softballs and the cavity to close during baking.
5. About an hour before bake time, preheat your oven to 500° F./260° C., making sure your baking surface is in the top third of the oven.
6. Pick up a piece of the proofed dough in both hands and press your thumbs into the middle so that they almost touch your fingertips, gently rotating and stretching the dough

into a circle with a 4 in./10 cm. diameter, a paper-thin center and a thick rim—Leo Rosten’s “rubber wading pool” shape. Repeat until all the kuchen have been pulled.

7. Spoon about 1 tsp. of the onion filling into the center of each kuchen (if you’re using the raw minced onion, add salt and poppy seed separately). When all the kuchen have been filled, slide them into the oven and bake for 8 to 10 minutes until they are a rich brown. Have plenty of butter and/or cream cheese standing by!