

HOMESTEAD WIFE LIFE

Fresh-Milled Freezer Bagels

Master Lesson • Bread Baking Series - FRESHLY MILLED GRAINS

Fresh-Milled Freezer Bagels

“There is something deeply satisfying about pulling a homemade bagel from the freezer, letting it thaw while the coffee brews, and knowing breakfast is only minutes away.

Bagels have a reputation for being difficult, but they’re really just different. They teach us to work with a stiffer dough, trust the scale, and appreciate how small changes in technique create that beautiful chewy crust and tender interior we all love.

Today’s lesson isn’t simply about making bagels.

Today’s lesson is about building another baking skill that you’ll carry into every loaf, roll, and bun you bake in the future.”

Today’s Goal

Today’s goal isn’t simply to make excellent bagels.

Today’s goal is to become confident working with a stiff dough, trusting your scale, understanding fermentation, and learning to read dough instead of relying solely on the clock.

The bagels are simply a delicious reward.

The Homestead Wife Life Promise

Every recipe is thoroughly tested in my own kitchen using the ingredients and methods I teach. My goal isn’t simply to help you make one successful recipe—it’s to help you build the confidence and skills to cook, bake, preserve, and grow food for the people you love

What You'll Learn

By the end of this lesson you'll understand how to:

- ✓ Work confidently with a stiff dough.
 - ✓ Build gluten in freshly milled flour.
 - ✓ Use autolyse to improve dough strength.
 - ✓ Shape beautiful, evenly sized bagels.
 - ✓ Understand why bagels are boiled before baking.
 - ✓ Cold ferment for deeper flavor.
 - ✓ Build a freezer breakfast system your family will love.
 - ✓ Read the dough instead of simply watching the clock.
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Difficulty

Intermediate

While bagels introduce several new techniques, each one builds naturally on skills you've already learned throughout the Bread Baking Series.

Yield: 12 large bagels (140g each before boiling)

Active Time: Approximately 1½ hours

Cold Fermentation: 12–24 hours

Bake Time: 20–22 minutes

Before You Begin

Please Read the Recipe Completely

One of the best habits you can develop as a baker is reading a recipe from beginning to end before you begin mixing.

Understanding where you're headed makes every step easier, helps you avoid surprises, and allows you to prepare everything you'll need before you start.

Today's recipe includes an overnight refrigeration step, so a little planning ahead will reward you with exceptional flavor and texture.

Why We Teach the “Why”

If this is your first Homestead Wife Life lesson, welcome.

Throughout the Bread Baking Series you'll notice that I explain not only **what** we're doing, but **why** we're doing it.

Recipes teach us what to make.

Understanding teaches us how to become better bakers.

My goal isn't simply to help you make one successful batch of bagels.

My goal is to help you become confident enough to create beautiful bread for years to come.

Ingredients & Mixing the Dough

Ingredients

Dough

- 600g bread flour
 - 250g Kamut berries, freshly milled
 - 150g hard white wheat berries, freshly milled
 - 620g cool water (approximately 75°F)
 - 30g barley malt syrup (*or honey*)
 - 20g fine sea salt
 - 7g instant yeast
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Boiling Bath

- 3 quarts water
 - 45g barley malt syrup (*about 2 tablespoons*)
 - 1 tablespoon baking soda (*optional, encourages deeper browning*)
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Finishing

- 1 egg white whisked with 1 tablespoon water (*only needed for toppings applied after an overnight rest*)
 - Toppings of your choice
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Why We Bake in Grams

If you've baked with me before, you've probably noticed I almost always work in grams.

There's a reason.

Professional bakers measure by weight because weight is consistent. A cup of flour can vary dramatically depending on how it's scooped, but 600 grams is always 600 grams.

When you're learning to bake bread, consistency builds confidence.

A kitchen scale is one of the best investments you can make.

Step 1 — Mill the Grain

Mill the Kamut and hard white wheat on your finest setting.

If possible, mill immediately before mixing the dough. Freshly milled flour carries aromas, oils, and flavors that simply can't be duplicated once flour has been sitting on a shelf.

Always weigh your flour after milling.

Whole berries and the flour they produce weigh essentially the same, but weighing after milling keeps your formula accurate and your math honest.

Caring for Your Grain Mill

People often ask how I clean my grain mill.

I don't wash it with water.

Instead, I simply use a small electric air blower—the same one I use for cleaning my camera equipment—to blow away any remaining flour before putting the mill away.

It takes less than a minute, keeps moisture away from the stones or burrs, and leaves the mill clean and ready for the next baking day.

Step 2 — Mix the Dough

In the bowl of your stand mixer, whisk together the bread flour, freshly milled Kamut flour, freshly milled hard white flour, and instant yeast.

In a separate container, dissolve the barley malt syrup into the cool water.

Pour the liquid into the flour mixture and mix on low speed just until no dry flour remains.

At this stage, the dough will look rough, shaggy, and noticeably stiff.

That is exactly what we're looking for.

Resist the urge to add extra water.

Bagel dough is one of the stiffest doughs you'll make, at approximately **62% hydration**. That firmness is what creates the signature chewy texture bagels are known for.

Step 3 — Autolyse

Cover the bowl and allow the dough to rest for **20 minutes**.

During this time, the freshly milled flour fully absorbs the water before kneading begins.

This short pause makes the dough easier to work with, encourages gluten development, and reduces the amount of kneading required.

Why Autolyse Matters

If you've baked through the Bread Baking Series with me, you've heard me talk about autolyse many times.

That's intentional.

Some techniques are so valuable they're worth repeating.

Autolyse allows the flour to hydrate naturally before mechanical mixing develops the gluten.

The result is often a stronger dough, improved texture, and less work for both you and your mixer.

Once you begin using this technique regularly, you'll likely find yourself adding it to many of your bread recipes—even those that don't specifically call for it.

NOTE

Always read the recipe completely before you begin.

A few minutes spent understanding the process before mixing will save frustration later. Bagels include several unique steps—such as an overnight cold fermentation and boiling before baking—that are easiest to manage when you've already read through the entire lesson.

Kneading, Bulk Fermentation & Shaping

Step 4 — Add the Salt and Knead

After the 20-minute autolyse, sprinkle the salt evenly over the dough.

Knead on low to medium-low speed for **8–10 minutes**.

This dough is intentionally firm and will make your mixer work.

If your mixer begins struggling, divide the dough in half and knead in two batches, or finish kneading by hand.

When properly developed, the dough should feel:

- Smooth
- Dense
- Satiny
- Firm
- Slightly springy when gently pressed

Unlike sandwich bread dough, **bagel dough is not expected to produce a full windowpane**.

That isn't a failure.

It's exactly what we're looking for.

Learn to Read the Dough

Timers are helpful.

Recipes are helpful.

But neither can replace learning to read your dough.

By the end of kneading, your dough should no longer feel rough or shaggy. Instead, it should feel tight, smooth, and noticeably stronger than when you first mixed it.

As you continue baking, you'll rely less on the clock and more on what your hands are telling you.

That confidence comes one batch at a time.

Step 5 — Bulk Fermentation

Shape the dough into a smooth ball and place it into a lightly oiled bowl.

Cover and allow the dough to rise at room temperature for **60–90 minutes**, or until it has increased in volume by approximately **50 percent**.

Do not allow the dough to double.

Over-fermented bagel dough loses much of the wonderful chew that makes a great bagel.

Bigger Isn't Better

Many bread recipes encourage doubling during the first rise.

Bagels are different.

We're building strength, not maximum volume.

Stopping the fermentation earlier helps preserve the dense, chewy crumb that defines an excellent bagel.

Step 6 — Divide

Turn the dough onto a clean, unfloured work surface.

Divide into **12 equal portions (140 grams each)**.

Use your kitchen scale.

Equal-sized bagels bake evenly, cool evenly, freeze evenly, and toast evenly.

Those small details make a surprising difference in the finished product.

Why I Don't Flour the Counter

Throughout the Bread Baking Series you've probably noticed that I rarely dust my countertop with flour while shaping dough.

Instead, I prefer working directly on a clean counter.

That tiny bit of friction helps the dough grip the surface while building tension.

Adding flour often causes the dough to slide instead of tightening.

Around here...

We call that “**the slips.**”

Step 7 — Pre-Shape

Shape each portion into a smooth, tight ball.

Cover the dough balls with a clean kitchen towel and allow them to rest for **10 minutes**.

This short rest allows the gluten to relax, making the final shaping much easier.

Don't skip it.

Water Is Your Friend

If the dough begins sticking to your hands, resist the urge to dust everything with flour.

Instead, lightly dampen your hands with water.

A little moisture prevents sticking without changing the dough's hydration.

If you've been baking with me for a while, you've probably seen me reach for the faucet instead of the flour bin more times than you can count.

There's a reason.

It works beautifully.

Step 8 — Shape the Bagels

You have two excellent options.

The Poke Method

Lightly dampen your thumb if needed.

Press straight through the center of the dough ball and gently stretch the opening until it measures approximately **2 inches across**.

It will shrink considerably during proofing and boiling, so make the hole larger than feels natural.

The Rope Method

Roll the dough into a rope approximately **9 inches long**.

Wrap it around the back of your hand, overlapping the ends by about **2 inches** in your palm.

Press the seam firmly together, then roll it gently against the countertop to seal.

Many bakers prefer this method because it creates slightly greater surface tension and produces an exceptionally chewy bagel

Place six bagels on each parchment-lined baking sheet that has been lightly dusted with semolina or cornmeal.

Leave enough space between each bagel for expansion during the overnight proof.

There's No “Right” Way

People often ask which shaping method is best.

The answer?

The one that consistently gives **you** beautiful bagels.

Try both.

Practice both.

Over time you'll naturally gravitate toward the method that feels most comfortable in your hands.

Beautiful bread comes from repetition—not perfection.

Cold Fermentation, Boiling & Baking

Step 9 — Cold Ferment Overnight

Cover the sheet pans tightly with plastic wrap or place each pan inside a large food-safe bag.

Refrigerate for **12–24 hours**.

This overnight rest isn't simply about convenience.

It's one of the most important steps in the entire recipe.

During the cold fermentation the dough develops deeper flavor, strengthens its structure, and creates the beautiful skin that allows the bagels to boil cleanly.

For me, it also transforms bagel making into a schedule that fits real life.

Mix and shape one afternoon.

Bake fresh bagels the following morning.

Why We Refrigerate Overnight

Cold fermentation quietly does some of the hardest work for us.

Time develops flavor in ways extra yeast never can.

The refrigerator also firms the surface of the dough, making the bagels much easier to handle during the boil while helping them keep their beautiful shape.

Patience is one of the ingredients.

A Second Schedule That Works

Not every kitchen has room for two full sheet pans.

If refrigerator space is limited, here's another option.

After the bulk fermentation, cover the bowl and refrigerate the dough overnight.

The following day:

- Remove the dough from the refrigerator.
- Allow it to warm slightly for 30–45 minutes.
- Divide into twelve 140-gram portions.
- Rest 10 minutes.
- Shape the bagels.
- Continue with the float test, boil, and bake.

I still prefer shaping before the overnight rest whenever possible, but this schedule produces excellent bagels and is much easier for smaller kitchens.

Step 10 — The Float Test

The next morning, remove one bagel from the refrigerator and gently place it into a bowl of cool water.

A properly proofed bagel should float within **10 seconds**.

If it sinks, allow the pans to sit at room temperature for **20–30 minutes**, then test again.

The Dough Makes the Decision

The float test tells you more than the clock ever can.

Instead of wondering whether the dough has proofed long enough, let the dough answer the question for you.

Learning to trust your observations instead of simply watching the timer is one of the biggest steps toward becoming a confident baker.

Step 11 — Prepare the Boiling Bath

Preheat your oven to **450°F**.

Position the oven racks in the upper and lower thirds of the oven.

Bring **3 quarts of water** to a gentle simmer.

Stir in:

- **45 grams barley malt syrup**
- **1 tablespoon baking soda (optional)**

The malt syrup adds a beautiful color and flavor.

The baking soda encourages additional browning.

Why We Boil Bagels

Boiling is what separates a bagel from an ordinary bread roll.

The brief boil gelatinizes the starches on the outside of the dough, creating the shiny crust and signature chew that make bagels unique.

Skip the boil and you'll still have delicious bread...

...but it won't truly be a bagel.

Step 12 — Boil

Working with **3–4 bagels at a time**, transfer them directly from the refrigerator into the simmering water.

Boil for:

45 seconds on the first side

Turn gently.

45 seconds on the second side

Lift each bagel out using a spider strainer or slotted spoon.

Allow any excess water to drain for a few seconds before returning the bagels to the baking sheet.

Longer Isn't Better

A longer boil creates a thicker, chewier crust.

A shorter boil produces a softer bagel.

After many batches, I've found **45 seconds per side** creates the balance I enjoy most.

Once you've mastered the recipe, feel free to experiment and discover your own favorite texture.

Releasing Cold Bagels

Occasionally a chilled bagel will cling to the parchment paper.

Rather than pulling on the dough, gently slide a bench scraper underneath the bagel to release it.

Supporting the entire bagel helps preserve the beautiful shape you worked so hard to create.

Toppings, Baking & Building Your Working Freezer

Step 13 — Add Your Toppings

Toppings adhere best immediately after boiling while the surface of the bagel is still damp.

There's no need for an egg wash unless your bagels have dried during a long overnight rest.

Simply press the top of each freshly boiled bagel into your prepared toppings or sprinkle generously over the surface.

Work efficiently.

You have about a minute before the surface begins to dry.

Set Up Your Topping Station First

Before you begin boiling, prepare all of your toppings.

Once the bagels come out of the water, everything happens quickly.

Having your toppings ready allows you to move smoothly from boiling to topping without feeling rushed.

A little preparation makes the entire process much more enjoyable.

Step 14 — Bake

Bake at **450°F** for **20–22 minutes**, rotating and swapping the pans halfway through baking. Your finished bagels should develop a rich golden-brown crust with a beautiful glossy sheen. Transfer immediately to a cooling rack.

How to Tell When They're Done

The timer is only one piece of information.

Look for several signs working together.

Your finished bagels should:

- ✓ Be deeply golden brown.
- ✓ Have a beautiful glossy crust.
- ✓ Feel surprisingly light for their size.
- ✓ Have evenly browned bottoms.
- ✓ Reach an internal temperature of **200°F or higher**.

Every oven bakes a little differently.

Learning these visual cues will serve you far better than memorizing a bake time.

Step 15 — Cool Completely

Allow the bagels to cool completely before slicing.

This usually takes **at least 90 minutes**.

Resist the temptation to rush this step.

Cooling allows the crumb to finish setting while excess steam escapes naturally.

Steam Is the Enemy of Frozen Bread

Warm bread continues releasing steam long after it leaves the oven.

If that steam becomes trapped inside a freezer bag, it condenses into moisture and softens the crust you've worked so hard to create.

A little patience here makes a remarkable difference later.

The Working Freezer System

One afternoon of baking can become weeks of easy breakfasts.

That's exactly why I developed this recipe.

This isn't simply a recipe that freezes well.

It was intentionally designed to become part of your **Working Freezer**.

Step 1 — Cool Completely

Allow the bagels to cool for at least **90 minutes** before packaging.

Step 2 — Slice Every Bagel

Slice every bagel completely through before freezing.

This one simple habit transforms your morning routine.

Frozen bagels can go directly into the toaster without thawing.

No waiting.

No frozen knife gymnastics.

Just breakfast.

Step 3 — Flash Freeze

Place the sliced bagels back together and arrange them on a baking sheet.

Freeze uncovered for approximately **one hour**.

This firms the crust and prevents the bagels from sticking together inside the freezer bag.

Step 4 — Bag and Label

Transfer the frozen bagels into freezer bags or vacuum-seal bags.

Remove as much air as possible.

Label each bag with:

- Variety
- Date prepared

For the very best quality, enjoy it within **three weeks**.

Properly packaged, they'll remain excellent for up to **three months**.

Step 5 — Enjoy

Toast directly from frozen.

No thawing required.

A medium or medium-low toaster setting works beautifully.

If you'd rather warm several at once, place them into a **350°F oven** for **8–10 minutes**.

Freeze First. Toast Later.

One of the biggest surprises for people is discovering that frozen-to-toaster bagels often taste fresher than bagels that were thawed first.

Freezing locks in freshness.

Toasting restores the crust.

It's a simple little system that makes busy mornings feel much less busy.

Freezing Unbaked Bagels

If you prefer baking only a few bagels at a time, you can also freeze the shaped, unproofed bagels after shaping.

Boil them directly from frozen, adding approximately **15 seconds per side** to the boiling time.

While this method works well, my personal preference is still to bake the entire batch first.

It creates the quickest, easiest breakfasts and has become one of the most-used systems in my own kitchen.

The Topping Station

One of my favorite things about making bagels at home is that every batch can be a little different.

Set out several toppings before you begin boiling, and let everyone create their own favorites.

Everything Bagel

Combine equal parts:

- White sesame seeds
- Poppy seeds
- Dried minced onion
- Dried minced garlic

Add flaky salt at approximately half the amount of the other ingredients.

Sesame

A generous coating of white sesame seeds.

Or mix white and black sesame seeds for a beautiful presentation.

Poppy Seed

Simple. Classic. Always delicious.

Onion

Generously coat with dried minced onion.

Watch carefully during the last few minutes of baking, as onions can brown quickly.

Plain

Sometimes the simplest bagel is still everyone's favorite.

Cinnamon Raisin Variation

This variation is added **after dividing the dough**, not during the initial mixing.

For approximately **4 bagels**:

- Soak **120 grams of raisins** in hot water for 10 minutes.
- Drain thoroughly.
- Flatten one 560-gram portion of dough (4×140 g).
- Scatter the raisins over the dough.
- Sprinkle 1 1/2 **teaspoons of cinnamon**.
- Fold and knead gently until evenly distributed.
- Divide into four 140-gram portions.
- Shape as usual.

Why We Add the Raisins Later

Adding raisins to the entire batch before gluten develops makes kneading more difficult.

Adding cinnamon too early can also slow yeast activity.

By waiting until after the dough has been divided, we preserve the strength of the dough while creating beautifully distributed cinnamon raisin bagels.

One final tip...

Tuck any exposed raisins beneath the surface before boiling.

A raisin sitting on the outside of the bagel has a habit of becoming a little piece of charcoal in the oven.

Alternative Flour Adjustments

One of the things I love most about baking with freshly milled flour is learning how different grains contribute to the finished loaf.

Once you understand the purpose of each flour, adjusting recipes becomes much less intimidating.

No Grain Mill Yet?

- 600g bread flour
- 400g high-quality store-bought whole wheat flour
- Reduce water to **590g**

You'll sacrifice a little freshness, but you'll still produce an excellent bagel.

All Bread Flour

- 1000g bread flour
- Reduce water to **570g**

This creates a classic New York–style bagel.

Durum

Replace the Kamut with durum flour.

Expect a beautiful golden color and a slightly sweeter finish.

Red Wheat

Replace the **Character Note** with your favorite red wheat.

The texture remains essentially unchanged while the flavor becomes noticeably deeper.

Spelt

Limit spelt to the **15% Character Note** and reduce the water by **15 grams**.

Einkorn

Limit einkorn to **10% or less** of the total flour.

Its beautiful flavor comes with a much weaker gluten structure.

Soft Wheats

Save these for biscuits, cakes, cookies, and pastries.

Bagels are built for strength and chew.

From My Kitchen to Yours...

May your flour always be fresh, your dough rise beautifully, and your table always have room for one more.

Now...

Go make something wonderful.



Tamatha Mavraides
Homestead Wife Life