Basic Straight Dough Demi-Boules

My everyday yeasted loaf, baked small in a dual-loaf baker

Makes: 2 or 4 demi-boules **Oven:** 450°F **Bake:** about 30 minutes for demi-boules

INGREDIENTS

	2 demi-boules	4 demi-boules
Bread flour	2 cups	4 cups
Instant yeast	1⅛ tsp	2¼ tsp
Fine sea salt	¾ tsp	1½ tsp
Honey	1 tsp	2 tsp
Warm water (105°F to 110°F)	1 cup	2 cups
Water for the salt	1½ tsp	1 Tbsp
Old dough, if you have it	optional	optional
Dough, about	**500 g**	**1,000 g**

The math. Each demi-boule is about **250 g** of dough. Weigh your whole batch after the rise and divide by the number of loaves you want. Half batch, divide by 2. Full batch, divide by 4. Your scale is more honest than your eye.

Sizing for the baker. A shaped ball should be about 1 inch narrower than the chamber all the way around and sit no more than halfway up the side. It needs room to spread and rise. If it looks too big, pinch a little off and bake it as a roll.

Making 4? The baker holds 2 at a time, so you bake in two rounds. Keep the second pair in the fridge while the first pair bakes so it doesn't over-proof.

METHOD

1. **Mix.** In a stand mixer, combine the warm water, honey, yeast and old dough, if using. Add the flour, then the salt with its little bit of water. Mix on low until absorbed.
2. **Knead.** Raise the speed and knead until you hear the dough slapping the side of the bowl, as I show in the video. It should be smooth and elastic.
3. **First rise.** Give the dough a quick shaping to build strength, set it in a lightly oiled bowl or dough bucket and cover.
4. **Stretch and fold.** Every 30 minutes, stretch and fold, 3 times in all. Then rest covered 60 to 90 minutes, until doubled.
5. **Heat the oven, really heat it.** Put the baker in, lid on, and heat to 450°F for at least an hour, even two. Why? Because the beep only means the air is hot. The walls and the baker need time to soak up heat, and that is what gives you great oven spring.
6. **Divide and pre-shape.** On a lightly floured surface, weigh and divide the dough into 2 or 4 pieces of about 250 g. Form each into a simple ball, cover and rest.
7. **Shape the demi-boules.** Fold the edges into the center, flip seam side down and drag toward you on the counter to tighten the top.
8. **Final proof.** Set each boule seam side up in a mini banneton, cover and proof 30 to 40 minutes, until they jiggle when you gently shake the banneton. No bannetons? See page 2. Making 4? Refrigerate the second pair now, covered.
9. **Score and bake.** Turn each boule out onto a silicone sling or a parchment square with a tail, score with a lame or sharp blade and lower it into a chamber. Bake 15 minutes lid on, about 15 lid off (keep the lid in the oven). That's 30 minutes for these small boules in my oven, but no two ovens are alike: trust your instant-read thermometer, not the clock. Done at 200°F to 205°F.
10. **Second round.** Put the lid back on the empty baker and reheat 10 minutes. Score the cold pair and bake the same way.
11. **Cool.** Cool at least 1 hour before slicing.

No Dual-Loaf Baker? Shape It Your Way

The same dough makes boules, baguettes or demi-baguettes

Dough: one full batch, about 1,000 g **Oven:** 450°F

OTHER SHAPES

2 full-size boules

Divide the dough in half, about 500 g each. Shape into boules and bake one at a time in a preheated Dutch oven, 30 minutes with the lid on, then 15 minutes with the lid off. Cool at least 90 minutes.

4 demi-baguettes

Divide the dough into 4 pieces, about 250 g each. Shape into baguettes, score with a lame or sharp knife and bake on a sheet pan or baguette tray for 17 to 20 minutes. Start checking at 17 minutes so they don't overbake: they're done when the center reads 200°F to 205°F. Cool 1 hour.

2 full baguettes

Divide the dough in half, about 500 g each. Shape, score and bake on a sheet pan or baguette tray for 20 to 25 minutes, until deep golden. Cool 1 hour.

1 boule and 2 demi-baguettes

My original split: half the dough for a Dutch oven boule, half for 2 demi-baguettes.

No Special Tools? No Problem.

Every tool here is a nice-to-have. Use these instead.

No bannetons? Line a small bowl with a cotton flour sack towel and dust it with rice flour.

No silicone sling? A parchment square with a tail works the same.

No lame? A plain razor blade or very sharp knife.

No cast iron? Bake on a sheet pan and make steam with ice cubes in a hot metal pan.

No dual-loaf baker? Use the shapes above.

Not having the extra money is never a reason not to learn a skill.

ABOUT THE CRUST

Why bake in cast iron? Because a heavy pot with a lid traps the steam coming off the dough. That moist heat keeps the crust soft long enough for the loaf to rise all the way. Then the lid comes off, and the crust turns crisp and deep golden.

No cast iron? Make your own steam. Set an empty metal pan on the bottom rack while the oven heats. When the bread goes in, toss a handful of ice cubes into the hot pan and close the door fast. Never use a glass pan for this. The cold ice can shatter hot glass. Is it exactly the same as cast iron? No, but it will be excellent, so don't let missing equipment stop you from baking.

Looking for a cast iron baker? The bakers I use and love are in my Holiday Gift Guide at homesteadwifelife.com.

WAYS TO USE THEM

Bread bowls. Hollow them out for soup or dips.

A braise in a bowl. Fill a hollowed boule with a braised dish. Toast the bread you pulled out with garlic butter and serve it alongside.

A bread spread. Bake a variety with different inclusions: olive, cheese or jalapeño on the savory side, cranberry orange or brown sugar cinnamon on the sweet side.

> **Caring for your bannetons.** Never wash the banneton itself. Just tap out the rice flour. If yours has a cloth liner, wash the liner, never the basket. If dough sticks, let it dry completely, then brush it out.

> **Baking for stuffing?** A lean dough drinks up the butter, sausage and wine. Enriched bread is already full. Cube, air dry, then toast. **Running late?** Fan the cubes on two sheet pans, then dry them in a 200°F oven until dry all the way through.