

# Basic Italian Bread

From the kitchen of: Joe Valencic

## **Ingredients:**

2 Cups water, lukewarm, 110°F (16 oz.)  
2 ½ teaspoons Instant Yeast  
5 ¾ Cups bread flour (1# 13 oz.)  
1 Tablespoon dark brown sugar (Regular brown sugar works fine)  
2 Tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil  
1 Tablespoon salt  
1 Egg white, lightly beaten  
2 Tablespoons sesame seeds

## **Directions:**

Mix flour, salt and yeast in a bowl and blend ingredients so they mix well. Using a dough hook attachment, add the flour and brown sugar to the water and mix on low speed until the dough starts to form. Drizzle the oil into the dough and beat on medium speed for 8 to 10 minutes, or until a smooth, firm, elastic dough is formed. (At this point I take it out and hand knead, adding flour if needed, for 5 minutes or until I'm happy with the texture of the dough. You want it smooth, not sticky.)

Transfer the dough to a lightly oiled bowl and spray the dough with a thin coating of cooking spray. Wrap the bowl with plastic wrap (I use plastic shopping bags instead of wasting plastic wrap. Put the bowl in the bag and tuck the handles underneath to keep out any breeze) and set aside to proof in a warm, draft-free place for 1 to hour or until doubled in size. Remove the plastic wrap (bag), punch down and flatten the rounded dough with the heel of your hand, and split into two equal pieces. Roll the dough up tightly, sealing the seam well. The dough should be elongated and oval-shaped, with tapered and rounded (not pointed) ends.

Preheat the oven lined with a pizza stone to 400° F. Alternately, an inverted baking sheet may be used in place of a pizza stone.

Place the dough on a baker's peel heavily dusted with semolina flour, or cornmeal, or alternately on an inverted baking sheet. (I use parchment paper on my peel dusted with cornmeal, so I can slide it all onto my pizza stone) Allow the dough to proof, loosely covered with sprayed plastic (I cut up the bag) and a dishtowel, for about one hour, or until doubled in size. Brush the dough with the egg white and sprinkle the sesame seeds over the top. Using a razor blade or sharp knife, score 3 (1/4-inch deep) slashes across the top of the dough at a 45 degree angle.

Spray the dough with water from a water bottle and place in the oven on the baking stone. Immediately close the oven and bake for 3 minutes. Open the oven door and spray the dough again with the water bottle. Close the oven door and bake for an additional 3 minutes before spraying the dough for a third time (the spraying of the dough will ensure a crisp golden brown crust). Bake the dough for 30 minutes, or until a hollow thud is heard when the bread is whacked with the bowl of a wooden spoon. Bread should have internal temperature of at least 200° F. Allow the bread to cool slightly on a wire rack before serving.