

Microbiology online

Bagels - Bread with a difference

Legend has it that the first bagel was made by a Viennese baker in 1683 who wanted to pay tribute to the King of Poland, Jan Sobieski, for saving the Austrian people from Turkish invaders. Knowing the king was a distinguished horseman the baker shaped the dough into a stirrup. The Austrian word for stirrup is bagel. The popularity of the bagel spread throughout Eastern Europe evolving as it did so into its characteristic doughnut shape. During the 1880s thousands of Eastern European Jews emigrated to America taking with them this unique type of bread. Since then the bagel has grown in popularity and is now a standard food item on supermarket shelves across the UK. What makes the bagel so different from ordinary bread is the cooking process. It is the only dough that is boiled before it is baked. It is this procedure that gives the bagel its unique texture and glossy crust.

Dave Roberts' Basic Bagel Recipe

Ingredients

225 ml milk, scalded (i.e. boiled & hot)
 50 g butter
 25 g castor sugar
 2 tsp dried yeast
 1/2 tsp salt
 white of 1 medium egg
 400 g strong plain flour

Method

1. Put the milk, butter and sugar into a mixing bowl and whisk thoroughly. The milk should be hot enough to melt the butter completely.
2. When the mixture is lukewarm sprinkle on the yeast and leave to rise. This will take some time, typically more than half an hour. To save time the yeast can be started off in warm water and the amount of milk reduced to allow for the water.
3. Stir in the egg white and salt, then beat in the flour to make a soft dough.
4. Turn the dough onto a floured board and knead until smooth and elastic.
5. Allow it to rise until doubled in size (about 1 hour). Do not allow the surface to dry out and form a skin as this restricts the rise. To prevent this use either a large plastic bowl with a snap-on lid or cover the mixing bowl with cling-film or a wet tea-towel.
6. Knock the dough back and knead briefly to remove the largest gas bubbles.
7. Divide the dough into 16 balls about the size of a small orange. Push a floured finger through the centre of one of the balls. Twirl the bagel around the finger on the work surface (think hula-hoop) until the hole is at least one third the diameter of the whole. Repeat for the other balls.
8. Place them on a tray and leave in a damp place. Dave uses a cake cooling rack to support a wet tea-towel over them.
9. Leave them to rise until they look puffy, which can be as little as 10 or 15 minutes. Don't wait too long, they should not double in size.
10. Preheat the oven to 200°C (Gas mark 6).
11. Prepare a large shallow pan of gently boiling water.
12. Put the bagels into the water a few at a time so that they don't touch one another. They will float about halfway in and out of the water. Leave them to rise for 15 or 20 seconds then lift them out with a slotted spoon, and arrange them on to a greased baking tray. They won't rise much more than the size they are now.
13. Bake for about 20 minutes, until they are golden brown and sound hollow when you tap them.
14. Transfer them to a baking rack to cool.

Extras

Toppings like seeds can be added to the surface of the bagel prior to baking. The dough can be sweetened by adding sugar to flour. Different types of bagel can be made by the addition of, for example, raisins to the basic dough after kneading has taken place.

