HOW TO Mix with the No-Knead Method

Jim Lahey, renowned baker and cookbook author, popularized this revolutionary technique. It reinforces the idea that when left alone—with minimal work but plenty of time—the combined ingredients will do what’s in their nature to do: produce a great loaf of bread. Despite its label, to say that this is a completely “no-knead” method isn’t 100% true. There’s some manipulation involved, but the handling is much less than a typical dough requires. This dough relies on time passing—and the baker’s patience—to do the work that your hands would usually tackle. Because of the slack consistency of this dough, we recommend shaping it into a 0.75–1 kg boule and baking it in a clay pot or a cast-iron combination cooker.

The method below is the one developed by Lahey. It works well, but we also developed variations that work better for our kitchen. For instance, we found that doubling the yeast means the dough will be ready to bake within 8 hours of bulk fermenting, rather than the 14–20 hours suggested in the original recipe, adding to the method’s convenience. We also found that the Dutch oven commonly used for baking no-knead bread can be problematic; it’s difficult to transfer proofed dough into the vessel without dropping it in and deglazing it. To avoid this flub, proof the dough in the pot you will be baking it in. After the dough has rested in step 6, transfer it into a lightly oiled and floured Dutch oven, cast-iron combination cooker, or clay pot (do not preheat whichever vessel you use). Cover the dough with the lid rather than a clean kitchen towel. Once the dough has proofed, bake it per the instructions. In our tests, proofing the dough in this way and then placing it into a hot oven yielded excellent results and minimized dough damage from manipulation.

1 Stir the flour, salt, and yeast in a bowl or plastic tub.

2 Add the water and mix until sticky, using your hand or a rubber spatula.

3 Continue to mix thoroughly until you achieve a homogeneous mass. Bulk ferment 12–18 hours at room temperature in a lightly oiled plastic tub with a lid, or a bowl that’s covered with plastic wrap. No folding is necessary.

4 Transfer the dough onto a well-floured surface after bulk fermenting.

5 Fold the dough once or twice, let it rest for 15 minutes, and then round the dough out gently without stressing it. (This dough is not as resilient as stronger doughs that can be preshaped into a boule.)

For more on Jim Lahey, see his biography, page 4-43.