



No-Knead, Choose-Your-Own-Adventure Rustic Bread with Garlic, Herbs, and Cheese

Goes great with a pint of mead after a long adventure!

The Ingredients:

Wet:

1 cup warm water (100-110°)
3 tbsp olive oil

Dry:

2.5 cups bread flour (AP flour is okay, slower rise)
1 packet active dry yeast (or 7 grams or 2 .25 tsp)
1 tbsp sugar
1 1/2 tsp salt (don't forget the salt!)

Choose the garlic:

1 tbsp garlic powder + one roasted garlic head OR
2 tbsp garlic powder OR
2 tbsp freeze-dried garlic OR
choose your own OR
none

Choose the chopped herbs:

1 tbsp fresh, freeze-dried, or dried rosemary OR
1 tbsp thyme OR
1 tbsp oregano OR
1 tbsp blend of rosemary, thyme, and oregano OR
choose your own OR
none

Choose the cheese:

1.5 cups of shredded cheese OR
1 cup of shredded parmesan cheese OR
a blend OR
choose your own OR
none

The Instructions:

The Yeast:

First, proof the yeast by mixing dry active yeast and sugar in a small bowl. Add in warm water and stir well. Allow to stand for 10 minutes. Yeast should activate and become frothy on top, if not, your yeast has expired and will need to be replaced.

The Dough:

While the yeast is proofing, in a larger bowl (cannot be plastic), mix dry ingredients, all of your garlic (if using), all of your herbs (if using), half of your cheese (if using), and create a well in the middle of the bowl. A well is a small indentation in the middle of your dry ingredients, much like a bowl to pour your wet ingredients into. I like to use the underside of my one-cup measuring spoon to create it. Set this aside.

After the yeast proofing is complete, add the olive oil to the yeast mixture and stir gently, then immediately pour this into the dry ingredients. Use a rubber spatula to slowly combine the dry and wet ingredients, then switch to using your hands to press it all together.

Once everything is incorporated, the dough will be tacky but not sticky. If all of the dry mixture will not blend well, you can add a very small amount of water until it does. Remember, you want a tacky dough, but not sticky. Also, remember that the next step will add a bit of flour as well.

Sprinkle a light dusting of flour over a clean dry surface. Transfer the dough on top of the flour and form the dough into a boule (a dough ball) by folding the edges of the dough under the center. It's not as complicated as it sounds once you do it the first time. Here's a video of this process:

The Instructions, Continued:

Use olive oil to lightly grease the same large bowl you used to mix the ingredients and drop the boule into it. Cover with plastic wrap or a lid and let the dough rise until it has doubled in size. Pick a warm, dry, and safe area for your bread to rise. You don't want a kid or pet knocking into it and popping it.

This should take anywhere from 1 to 3 hours. The time it takes to rise will be affected by the altitude and humidity of your location, as well as which flour you use. (For reference, I live on the Oregon Coast and it takes a little less than an hour with King Arthur Bread Flour in a home with a constant 45% humidity.)

When the dough has doubled in size, uncover, smack to deflate (Hey, I meant like an encouraging attaboy smack, not a corporal punishment smack!), and transfer to a flat surface that has been lightly dusted with flour. Add the rest of your cheese (if using) and once again form into a beautiful boule.

Place an oversized sheet of parchment paper into a bowl so that the paper is larger than the bowl, drop the dough ball into the parchment-lined bowl, (cut a decorative slit or two on the top if you'd like), cover with a kitchen towel, and let rise a second time for 30-45 minutes. It won't double in size this time but it will be noticeably larger.

We are using parchment paper so that you don't have to grease your cooking vessel. There's a bit of an art to getting that right for bread and we can learn that later for making sandwich loaves and such where it is a more appropriate method. For now, let's keep the number of steps, and dirty dishes, to a minimum.

Cooking:

Note: while you don't need to cook this bread in a dutch oven at all, I have found that it comes out better this way for me personally. The taste is not noticeably different, but it is the easiest of the two methods and I get a very consistent crust this way. The goal is to create an environment with steam so that the bread forms an amazing, airy texture and a hard, rustic crust that pops open due to the steam. With this method, you don't have to add any extra water to the oven as the water within the dough will get captured by the dutch oven.

With a dutch oven:

While the dough is rising again, preheat the oven with an empty dutch oven in it at 425°.

Once the dough has risen a second time and the dutch oven is preheated, remove the lid with the pot holder, then use the parchment paper as handles to carefully put the dough into the dutch oven without burning yourself.

Put the lid back on with pot holders and place in oven to bake for 30 minutes covered.

After 30 minutes, remove the lid and decide if you want to let it bake uncovered a few minutes longer to achieve the desired level of golden brown. Do not overcook the bread! Keep an eye on it, because it won't take long. Five minutes makes a huge difference at this stage.

Without a dutch oven:

While the dough is rising again, place a bowl or tray of hot water at the bottom of the oven. This creates steam which in turn creates a wonderful top crust that this bread is known for. Preheat the oven with an empty pot, pan, or tray in the middle rack at 400°. You can use any cooking vessel that will allow room for the bread to expand.

Once the dough has risen a second time and the oven is preheated, use the parchment paper as handles to carefully place the dough into the pan without burning yourself.

After 30 minutes, check to see if you need to add a few minutes longer to achieve the desired level of golden brown. Do not overcook the bread! Keep an eye on it, because it won't take long. Five minutes makes a huge difference at this stage.

Cool, Cut, and Serve!

When you take the bread out of the oven, use the parchment paper to take it out of the pan, slide the bread onto a cooling rack, and let the bread cool at least 30 minutes before cutting into it. Do not cover or store your bread until it has fully cooled to the center or it will get soggy and go spoil earlier than it should. A dry, room temperature bread is a very happy bread.

Enjoy with or without some salted butter!
Welcome to bread making! It's so much fun.