

The Most Delicious Housemade Bagels

2 cups water

4 teaspoons active dry yeast or 3 teaspoons SAF instant yeast

2 tablespoons sugar or malt syrup

2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1 tablespoon salt

5 1/2 to 6 cups bread flour

2 tablespoons vital wheat gluten

1 tablespoon baking soda, for boiling water bath

1 egg white and 1 tablespoon water beaten until foamy, for glaze

Sesame seeds, poppy seeds, caraway seeds, coarse sea salt, minced dehydrated onion flakes, chopped fresh garlic, or a combination, for topping

In a small bowl, pour in the 1/2 cup of the warm water. Sprinkle the yeast and a pinch of sugar over the surface of the water. Stir to dissolve and let stand at room temperature until foamy, about 10 minutes.

In a large bowl using a balloon wire whisk or in the work bowl of a heavy-duty electric mixer fitted with a paddle attachment, combine the remaining water, oil, salt, 2 cups of flour, and the gluten. Beat hard on medium speed until creamy, 1 minute. Stir in the yeast mixture and another cup of flour; beat another minute. Add the remaining flour, 1/2 cup at a time. Switch to a wooden spoon when necessary if making by hand or, if using the electric mixer, insert the dough hook attachment. The dough will be slightly stiff, sticky, and just clear the sides of the bowl.

Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface with the plastic dough scraper. Use the plastic scraper to begin the first kneads, if kneading by hand, dusting with flour only 1 tablespoon at a time, just enough as needed to prevent sticking. Knead 8 to 10 minutes. If kneading in the electric mixer, knead 6 minutes by a timer on medium speed. This dough is rather stiff, yet very smooth and springy, with no stickiness.

Leave the dough in the mixing bowl and cover. Let rest at room temperature 1 hour; dough will be puffy. Parchment-line 2 heavy baking sheets and grease lightly by spraying with some nonstick vegetable cooking spray.

Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface and divide it into quarters. Divide each quarter into 3 equal portions. Shape each piece of dough into a smooth round ball. Flatten with your palm. Poke a floured finger through the middle of the ball. Stretch the hole with your finger rolling around the inside of the hole to make it about 1-inch in diameter. Continue to roll your finger or thumb around inside the dough to enlarge the hole; it will shrink slightly when you stop. Place on the baking sheet, a few inches apart, while forming the other bagels. Spray with some nonstick vegetable cooking spray to prevent sticking and cover. Let rest 20 minutes; the bagels will be puffy. You can cover the pans of bagels with a double layer of plastic wrap and refrigerate up to 24 hours before boiling and baking, after this rest time, if desired.

After the bagels have rested 10 minutes, prepare the water bath. In a large pot (one as wide as possible; some bakers use a deep skillet), bring 4 to 6 quarts of water to a boil. Add the baking soda to the boiling water. Reduce heat to maintain a gentle low boil over medium heat. Preheat the oven to 425°.

With an oversized slotted spoon, lower 3 to 4 bagels at a time into the gently boiling water. They will drop to the bottom and then rise to the surface quickly. As they come to the surface, turn each bagel and boil them 2 minutes on the other side. This goes very quickly.

Remove from the boiling water with the slotted spoon and place 1 inch apart on the baking sheet (you can use the same one that was in the refrigerator). If too wet, place on a clean, dry tea towel for a moment, then place on the baking sheet. After boiling all the bagels, brush with the egg white glaze and sprinkle with desired topping(s). Bake in the preheated oven for 14 to 18 minutes, or until deep golden brown. Remove from the baking sheets to cool on racks.

Raisin Spice Bagels

Increase the sugar to 1/4 cup and add 1 1/2 teaspoons ground cinnamon, 1/2 teaspoon ground cardamom, and 1/4 teaspoon ground mace to the flour. Add 1 1/4 cups golden raisins during the mixing before adding all of the flour.

Pumpernickel Rye Bagels

Substitute 2 1/4 cups of dark rye flour for an equal amount of unbleached flour. Add 2 tablespoons caraway seeds to the flour.

Makes 1 dozen large bagels