

Ventura Limoncello Bread

Levain* (recipe below)

1 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups lukewarm water (about 80 degrees F.)

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup of Ventura Limoncello

5 $\frac{1}{2}$ Cups Bread flour unbleached (1 lb. 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ oz)

$\frac{1}{2}$ Cup raw wheat germ

4 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons sea salt

Grated zest of 3 lemons (about 3 or 4 tablespoons)

3 Tablespoons fresh thyme leaves slightly chopped (lemon thyme is best)

Olive oil

Put levain, water, Ventura Limoncello, flour, and wheat germ in bowl of mixer using a dough hook. Mix on low for 5 minutes. Cover the bowl of dough with a non terry cloth towel and let it rest for 20 minutes. Dough will be a little bit sticky.

Add salt and mix on low again for 3 minutes, then add zest and thyme leaves and continue mixing for another 3 or 4 minutes. Check temperature of dough with instant thermometer it should reach about 78 degrees. Dough might be a little sticky. Clean the mixing bowl and lightly coat with olive oil. Put the dough back in bowl, wrap it tightly with plastic wrap and let it ferment at 70 degrees (or so) for about 4 hours until it almost doubles.

Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured work surface and cut it into two equal pieces. Tuck the edges under each piece and cover with towel and let rest about

15 minutes. Then, working with one piece at a time, lightly flatten the dough into a 6 by 8 rectangle with an even thickness. Fold the short ends to meet in the middle and press down with heel of hand to seal seam. With the shorter edges parallel to the edge of the work surface, fold the bottom edge of dough to the center. Pat the seam with your hand. Fold the top edge over the seam to about 1 inch from the bottom. Seal the seam as before. Fold the dough once more so the top and bottom edges meet and again seal the seam. Tuck in each end and press firmly to get clean seal. Turn the dough seam side up and place one hand over the other and start rolling dough outward into a cylinder shape. Repeat working your hands to each end at the same time until you get a nice baguette shape about 18 inches long. Use as little flour as necessary as it will toughen dough. Place in baguette pan or on floured parchment paper that you have placed over a heavy tea towel with a pleat to separate the two loaves to keep their shape but also keep them from sticking together.

Dust lightly with flour and cover with cloth and slide pan into small trash can liner and close bag securely. Place into refrigerator and let them proof 12 to 24 hours. (I place mine in my wine refrigerator as the temperature is perfect for proofing)

Take the shaped baguettes out of refrigerator and remove plastic bag. Keep dough covered with cloth and set them out at room temperature to continue proofing until they reach an internal temp. of 62 degrees. (about 2 to 2 ½ hours)

Preheat oven to 500 degrees about 1 hour before baking. Remove cloth lightly flour again and flip bread dough onto a peel. Make 3 long cuts with razor blade about 5 inches long ½ inch deep. Open oven door and slide in baguettes on oven tiles if you have them, or in baguette pan. Keep a heavy pan in oven with some water in it to create steam, or use a water spritzer for first 5 minutes of baking. Just don't spray the bread dough. Reduce oven temperature to 450 degrees and do not open door for 20 minutes. Rotate loaves after 20 minutes for even baking and continue baking another 20 minutes. Whew, but it's all worth it when it's done.

Levain recipe:

I always save a golf ball size piece of dough from my last batch of bread and keep it in a small container in refrigerator covered with water until I need it. It usually lasts about 10 to 12 days for me.

First build:

One 1 ½ cup bowl and plastic wrap with rubber band.

Golfball sized dough aged 24 to 36 hours

3 Tablespoons water about 80 degrees

5 Tablespoons unbleached bread flour

Dissolve dough with water then add flour. Cover bowl securely with plastic wrap and rubber band. Let ferment at room temp. until it doubles in volume (about 12 hours)

Second build:

One 4 Cup sized bowl, plastic wrap and rubber band

1/3 cup lukewarm water 80 degrees

½ cup plus 2 tablespoons unbleached bread flour

Same instructions as above except let ferment only 6 hours until bubbly

Third build:

One 8 cup bowl, plastic wrap and rubber band

¾ cup lukewarm water 80 degrees

1 and ½ cups unbleached bread flour

Same instructions only let it ferment 4 to 5 hours until bubbly.

You now have a levain or chef that can be kept refrigerated for 24 to 36 hours to be used for your bread recipe.