FOOD & CULINARY

Paul Hollywood White Bread Recipe

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The Art of Baking: Mastering the Paul Hollywood White Bread Recipe

There is something deeply satisfying about pulling a perfectly baked loaf of white bread from the oven. The golden crust, the soft and airy crumb, and the comforting aroma that fills the kitchen evoke a sense of homely warmth that few other foods can match. Among the countless bread recipes that exist, few are as revered or as trusted as the Paul Hollywood white bread recipe. As a world-renowned baker and a familiar face on *The Great British Bake Off*, Paul Hollywood has perfected the art of bread making, and his white bread recipe is a cornerstone of home baking. Whether you are a complete novice or an experienced baker looking to refine your technique, this recipe offers a reliable path to exceptional results. In this article, we will explore every aspect of this celebrated recipe, from the essential ingredients to the step-by-step method, along with expert tips to help you achieve bakery-quality bread in your own kitchen.

Who is Paul Hollywood and Why His White Bread Recipe is So Popular

Paul Hollywood is a British baker and television presenter who has become a household name thanks to his role as a judge on *The Great British Bake Off*. With decades of experience working in top hotels and bakeries, Hollywood is known for his exacting standards and his deep understanding of the science behind baking. His white bread recipe is famous for its simplicity, reliability, and the superior texture it produces. Unlike many complicated artisan breads that require sourdough starters or lengthy fermentation times, the Paul Hollywood white bread recipe is approachable for home bakers while still delivering professional-grade results. Its popularity stems from the fact that it is a true classic: a versatile loaf that can be used for sandwiches, toast, or simply enjoyed with butter.

The Magic of Simple Ingredients

One of the hallmarks of the Paul Hollywood white bread recipe is its reliance on a handful of basic ingredients. You do not need any exotic or hard-to-find items; everything is readily available at your local supermarket. However, the quality and handling of these ingredients make all the difference.

- Strong White Bread Flour: Unlike plain flour, strong bread flour has a higher protein content, typically around 12 to 14 percent. This protein is essential for developing gluten, the network of strands that gives bread its structure and chewy texture. Paul Hollywood strongly recommends using strong white bread flour for the best results.
- Salt: Salt is not just for flavour; it also strengthens the gluten structure and helps to control the activity of the yeast. Always use fine sea salt or table salt for even distribution.
- Yeast: The recipe calls for fast-action dried yeast, which is convenient and reliable. You do not need to activate it in water beforehand; simply mix it with the flour. If you prefer fresh yeast, you can use it, but you will need to adjust the quantity and method slightly.
- Water: Water hydrates the flour and activates the yeast. The temperature of the water is crucial: it should

be lukewarm, around 37°C (98°F). Water that is too hot will kill the yeast, while water that is too cold will slow down the fermentation process.

- Unsalted Butter: A small amount of butter enriches the dough, giving the crumb a softer texture and a slightly tender crumb. It also adds a subtle richness to the flavour.
- Olive Oil: A little olive oil is used for greasing the bowl and your work surface. It prevents sticking and adds a faint fruity note to the crust.

Understanding the Role of Each Ingredient

The beauty of the Paul Hollywood white bread recipe lies in the balance of these ingredients. The flour provides the structure, the yeast provides the rise, the salt provides flavour and strength, the water provides hydration, and the butter provides tenderness. Each component has a specific function, and using the correct amounts is essential for success. For instance, too much salt can inhibit the yeast, resulting in a dense loaf, while too little salt can make the bread taste flat and cause it to rise too quickly and then collapse. Similarly, too much water can make the dough sticky and difficult to shape, while too little water can produce a dry, crumbly loaf. This recipe, as developed by Paul Hollywood, has been meticulously tested to ensure the perfect balance.

Step-by-Step Instructions for the Paul Hollywood White Bread Recipe

Follow these detailed steps to create a beautiful, airy loaf of white bread. Patience and attention to detail are your best allies in this process.

Preparing the Dough

Start by weighing your ingredients carefully. In a large mixing bowl, combine 500 grams of strong white bread flour, 10 grams of fine sea salt, and 10 grams of fast-action dried yeast. Whisk them together with a fork so that the salt and yeast are evenly distributed throughout the flour. Pour in 320 millilitres of lukewarm water and add 40 grams of softened unsalted butter. Using your hands, mix everything together until a rough dough forms. Do not worry if it looks shaggy at this stage; it will come together as you knead.

Kneading the Dough

Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface. Knead the dough for about 10 minutes. The technique is important: use the heel of your hand to push the dough away from you, then fold it back over itself. Give it a quarter turn and repeat. As you knead, the dough will become smoother, more elastic, and less sticky. If it feels too wet, add a tiny sprinkle of flour, but avoid adding too much, as this can make the bread dense. You will know the dough is ready when you can stretch a small piece of it thin enough to see light through it without it tearing. This is called the windowpane test, and it indicates that the gluten is well developed.

First Proving

Lightly oil a clean bowl with a little olive oil. Place the dough in the bowl, turning it once to coat it in oil. Cover the bowl with a clean tea towel or a piece of cling film. Leave the dough to rise in a warm, draught-free place for about one to two hours, or until it has doubled in size. The time will vary depending on the temperature of your room. A warm kitchen is ideal, but you can also use an airing cupboard or a slightly warmed oven (turned off).

Knocking Back and Shaping

Once the dough has risen, tip it out onto a lightly floured surface. Gently press the dough to knock the air out of it. This step, known as knocking back, redistributes the yeast cells and ensures an even crumb. Now, shape the dough into a loaf. You can shape it into a traditional oval or a round boule. To shape a loaf, flatten the dough into a rectangle, then fold the top edge down to the centre and the bottom edge up to meet it. Seal the seam with your fingers, then roll the dough into a log. Place the loaf, seam side down, in a lightly greased 2-pound loaf tin. Alternatively, you can shape it into a round and place it on a baking tray lined with parchment paper.

Second Proving

Cover the shaped loaf with a tea towel and let it rise again. This second prove is shorter, typically lasting 45 minutes to one hour. The dough should rise until it is just above the rim of the tin and feels springy to the touch. Do not over-prove it, or the bread may collapse in the oven. While the dough is proving, preheat your oven to 220°C (425°F) or 200°C (400°F) for a fan-assisted oven. Place a baking tray in the bottom of the oven to heat up.

Baking and Finishing

Just before baking, dust the top of the loaf with a little flour. Using a sharp knife or a baker's lame, make a few shallow slashes across the top of the dough. This allows the bread to expand during baking and gives it a beautiful, professional look. Place the loaf in the preheated oven. Pour a cup of water into the hot baking tray at the bottom of the oven to create steam. The steam helps to develop a crisp, glossy crust. Bake for 30 to 35 minutes, or until the bread is golden brown and sounds hollow when tapped on the bottom. If the top is browning too quickly, cover it loosely with foil for the last 10 minutes.

Once baked, remove the bread from the tin immediately and let it cool completely on a wire rack. This is important because cutting into warm bread can result in a gummy texture. Allow the loaf to cool for at least one hour before slicing.

Tips for Perfect Results with the Paul Hollywood White Bread Recipe

Even a simple recipe can present challenges. Here are some expert tips to help you get it right every time.

- Weigh your ingredients: Baking is a science, and accurate measurements are crucial. Use a digital kitchen scale for precision rather than relying on volume measurements like cups.
- Check your water temperature: If you do not have a thermometer, the water should feel like a comfortable bath temperature. It should be warm to the touch but not hot.
- Do not skip the windowpane test: This test is the most reliable way to know if you have kneaded the dough enough. Under-kneaded dough will produce a dense, heavy loaf.
- Create a warm environment for proving: If your kitchen is cold, the dough will take much longer to rise. You can place the bowl in a turned-off oven with a bowl of hot water next to it to create a warm, humid environment.
- Be gentle during shaping: Avoid overworking the dough during shaping. You want to retain some of the gas bubbles to keep the bread light and airy.
- Use steam: Steam is the secret to a professional crust. If you do not have a baking tray to add water, you can also spray the inside of the oven with water just after placing the loaf inside.

Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

Even experienced bakers encounter problems from time to time. Here are a few common issues with the Paul Hollywood white bread recipe and how to troubleshoot them.

Dense or heavy bread: This usually indicates under-kneading or insufficient proving. Make sure you knead the dough thoroughly and allow it enough time to double in size during the first prove. Also, check that your yeast is fresh and active.

Bread that collapses in the oven: This is often a sign of over-proving. If the dough has risen too much during the second prove, the gluten structure can become weak, and the bread will deflate in the oven. Keep an eye on the dough and bake it when it has risen just above the rim of the tin and still feels springy.

Pale or soft crust:A pale crust can result from baking at too low a temperature or not using steam. Ensure your oven is fully preheated to the correct temperature and use the steam method described above. For an extra-golden crust, you can brush the loaf with a little milk or egg wash before baking.

Bread that is dry or crumbly: This could be due to too much flour or over-baking. Measure your flour accurately and check the bread a few minutes before the recommended baking time. Use a digital thermometer if possible; the internal temperature of a fully baked loaf should be about 96°C (205°F).

Serving Suggestions and Variations

The Paul Hollywood white bread recipe is wonderfully versatile. A freshly baked slice with a generous spread of salted butter is a simple pleasure that never gets old. For breakfast, enjoy it toasted with jam or marmalade. It makes exceptional sandwiches, from classic ham and cheese to elegant cucumber sandwiches. It is also perfect for panzanella, bread pudding, or homemade croutons.

If you want to add variety to your baking, you can easily adapt this recipe. Try adding a handful of dried herbs, such as rosemary or thyme, to the flour for a savoury loaf. For a slightly sweeter version, fold in a cup of raisins or dried cranberries and a tablespoon of honey. You can also shape the dough into dinner rolls or a braided loaf for a more impressive presentation. The fundamental technique remains the same, and the reliable nature of this recipe means it can serve as the foundation for countless creations.

The Science Behind the Perfect Loaf

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