

Fr. George's Prosphora Recipe (Byzantine Style)

Note: This recipe has been compiled from numerous sources and various experiments, first posted January 31, 1999. Since that time, I have modified the recipe somewhat to reflect further experimentation. I am constantly looking for new ways to improve.

This recipe makes four Byzantine style loaves.



Ingredients

- High-gluten or regular bleached flour - 14 cups
- Hot (~100 degrees) water - 4 cups
- Active Dry Yeast - 1 1/2 Tbsp.
- Salt - 2 Tsp.
- Nothing else! [I'll comment later on why.](#)

Instructions

1. Place 12 cups of flour, salt and yeast in a large mixing bowl. Using a sturdy wooden spoon, mix the dry ingredients until blended.
2. Mix in all of the water, stirring with the spoon until the dough begins to clump up. When you can't use the spoon any longer, begin to knead the dough with your hands. Mash the clumps of dough into a single ball.



3. Here's where you need to stop and look at your workplace. To avoid kneading injuries, you need to be able to work the dough with straight arms. If you are short, like me, you can put the bread in the bowl and do your kneading on the floor in a kneeling position. Otherwise, put the ball on a floured board on your sink and start to work it.





4. Knead the dough with the heel of your palms, both pressing down and pushing the ball away from you. You shouldn't just press the dough, but stretch it out. The reason for this will be covered [elsewhere](#). Knead the dough for **20 minutes** . As you knead, stretch and slam the dough frequently to aerate the dough.
5. The consistency you are trying to achieve is crucial. I suggest the following: **first**, add more rather than less water right off the bat, then add flour to achieve the right consistency. Adding water to dry dough is messy, whereas adding flour to wet dough is a bit easier and faster. **Second**, the proper consistency is judged by pushing the well-mixed dough ball with a finger up to the second knuckle. If the dough sticks to the end of your finger but not the sides, you have the proper consistency. The dough, if folded over and pushed, should "heal" and not remain two pieces. Yet, it shouldn't stick to lightly floured, smooth surfaces. Add flour as you knead until you get the right consistency. *This takes practice!*



6. After 15-20 minutes have passed (or you collapse from exhaustion), cover the dough with plastic wrap in a bowl with enough room for the dough to grow. Leave a little gap or two for air to escape, but not enough for real circulation to occur and harden the surface of the ball. Place this in a warm place, like the oven before use. The heat from the pilot usually makes the oven ideal for rising (~80 degrees is sufficient).
7. Allow the dough to rise long enough to double in size (usually no more than 90 minutes).
8. Set your oven for 350 degrees Fahrenheit. Set your rack in the lower section of the oven. For a softer crust, consult the page on [Steam Baking](#).
9. Take the bowl and uncover the dough. Grabbing the sides of the ball where it is sticking to the bowl, pull it away from the sides and punch it down in the center. Keep doing this until the dough is roughly the same size it was before it began to rise. Bust air bubbles as they surface and knead for a few minutes.
10. Cut the ball into four equal pieces (the picture is from a larger batch). Work three of them into separate balls, place them back in the bowl and cover again. The piece left over will be your first loaf. Place it on a floured board, and cut it in half.



11. Choose one of the two pieces and work it until you are confident that there are virtually no air bubbles left in it. Form it into a ball, then flatten this out until it is around 1/2" thick





12. Take a 9" cake pan or the equivalent (I actually use a large coffee can with holes poked in the bottom) and press it into the dough, like a cookie cutter. This will give you a perfectly round loaf with little effort. Trim away the excess, and set this with the remaining portion aside.



13. Flour your pizza stone, baking sheet or baking pan, then lay the main loaf body on it.

- Using a conventional teaspoon or your fingers, take some water (about 1/2 tsp.) and pour it on the surface of the dough, rubbing it around with the bottom of the spoon. This dampens the top of the dough, making it sticky and allowing the seal portion to adhere without a bubble. *Do not allow the water to run off the top, otherwise it will cause the loaf to glue itself to the baking surface! Very bad!*





15. Now, roll out the remaining portion of the dough with extra flour, making it slightly thinner than the previous piece. Follow the same process as above. Make sure there is a fresh dusting of flour under this portion.
16. Using a dish of water, dampen your fingers and wet the top of the bottom portion, then moistening the bottom of the top portion. Make sure the water does not run off the loaf, because moisture under the loaf will make it stick like mad. Carefully lay the top on the bottom, make sure there aren't any air bubbles trapped between the layers: the easiest way is to apply the top like a sticker, starting on one edge and moving across the top of the loaf like a Band-aid.

17. Flour the seal and mash it into the loaf as hard as you can.



18. Now, here's where you'll need a tool: in my case, I use a Korean chopstick. This stick tapers gently down to a sharp point from the top to the bottom. When it pierces, it starts with a small hole and opens it, versus a blunt stick which will pull a good portion of the surface down with it and traumatize the seal.



19. Pierce the ends of the cross of the Lamb section, then once in the middle. You can then make decorative piercing along the perimeter of the loaf (I have seen some very elaborate ones).



20. Allow the loaf to sit out for 20 minutes and "proof." This is discussed in greater detail [elsewhere](#) .



21. Pop it into the oven. Set your timer for 15 minutes. When it goes off, form another loaf. By the time you're done, it will be ready to turn the loaf in the oven around to achieve even browning (if your oven is ancient like mine!). Set the timer for another 20 minutes, allowing for the proofing time for the second loaf and the finish of the first.

22. Repeat this until there's no more dough.



