

Pre-Ferments

The main purpose of pre-ferments is to improve flavor and structure by extending fermentation times. There are many types of pre-ferments, varying in the flour to water ratio and amount of yeast added. Here are 3 of the most commonly used:

Pâte Fermentée

or simply "old dough". A piece of white-flour dough that is reserved after mixing and incorporated into the next batch of bread. Of all the major yeasted pre-ferments, this is the only one that contains salt. It will last at most 48 hours before its leavening potential is expended. It can be frozen for 1 week.

Poolish

is a mixture of equal parts flour and water, with a very small portion of yeast added (depending on temperature and length of fermentation). For example, 1/4 teaspoon yeast to 2 cups flour + 2 cups water. Stir together and ferment at room temperature for up to 16 hours before use. It can be kept in the refrigerator for up to 2 days.

Biga

is a generic Italian term for "pre-ferment." It can be stiff textured (half, or a little more, as much flour as water). Yeast quantity is determined by ambient temperature, and by the length of time it will be left to ripen before the final dough is mixed. For example 1/2 teaspoon yeast to 2 1/2 cups flour + 1 cup water. Mix and then knead the dough. Ferment at room temperature for up to 16 hours (overnight). It can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 2 days or frozen for up to a week.