

# How To Build a Perfect Bagel

Eli Zabar offers five tips for making bagels as good as they can be.



COURTESY OF ELI ZABAR



by ELI ZABAR NOV 19, 2013



**1) Choose wisely**—Most bagels, especially outside of New York City, are way too sweet because a lot of places put sugar in their bagels, a trick they use to keep their bagels soft. A great authentic New York bagel is never too sweet! It's dense and chewy; expect a bit of a workout when you bite into it. And bagels are not meant to last forever. Try to eat your bagel within a few hours of when it was baked—six to eight at the most.

**2) Slice it right**—In order to build the perfect bagel, I like to suggest the way we do it at our restaurant, **E.A.T.** We call our bagel the "Tower of Bagel," which refers to the way we slice it. Take your bagel and carefully slice it horizontally *twice*, so it's almost like a triple decker sandwich. This method gives you the perfect ratio of crust to the inside of the bagel, in addition to giving you the perfect layered bite of all of the components.

**3) With a schmear**—At Eli's we like to use cream cheese with scallions. The scallions in the cream cheese add an ever so slight hint of onion that brings out the flavor of the smoked salmon. It's imperative that you take your scallion cream cheese and *schmear* it. Schmearing the cream cheese, not just spreading, is very important. Just the way a painter loads his brush to paint a thick coat, schmearing is different than simply spreading. With a good schmear you're getting about a 1/4 inch of cream cheese. And you need to make sure to get the cream cheese on both surfaces of the bagel, not just one!

**4) Layer the lox**—Once your cream cheese is on your two outer sides of your bagel, I suggest layering two paper thin slices of smoked salmon on top of them. Your salmon should be so thin that it's like cellophane: you should be able to practically see through it. This is important because it's not only about flavor but also about texture. It's also important to buy smoked salmon that has never been frozen—that's the only way to guarantee the right texture. Smoked salmon that has been frozen is often way too mushy. I like to use wild East Coast or Atlantic smoked salmon, which has a little bit of fattiness but not too much.

I don't endorse adding anything else to your bagel. Smoked salmon goes well with tomatoes, onions, and capers on a great piece of bread, but when it comes to bagels, they fundamentally resist tomatoes and onions. The texture of the bagel will only lead to your tomatoes and onions popping out of the bread when you bite into it—and no one wants to deal with that mess.

**5) Pair it**—Bagels and smoked salmon pair perfectly with a nice champagne. I recommend any small grower champagne. We carry several of these at our wine store **W.I.N.E.** One of my favorites is Selsosse. If you don't have champagne on hand, a Reisling from Hermann J. Wiemer in the Finger Lakes is another great option.