

HOW TO MAKE FRESH SOURDOUGH BREAD



Procedure:

Ingredients:

- 1 C Active (bubbly) starter
- 1 C Warm (90°) water
- 2 T EVOO
- 2 tsp Sea salt
- 3 C Flour (your choice)
- Extra oil for loaf pan
- Extra flour for dusting

Prep Time : 2-4 hours or overnight

Cook Time : 45 minutes

Mix together wet ingredients and salt before adding the flour. Dough will be shaggy after mixing (do not overmix) cover for 30 minutes. After 30 minutes you will stretch and fold; this means to pull a small portion of the outer edge up and over to the opposite edge while gently tugging and stretching the dough. You will do all four corners twice, for a total of 8 folds. Then cover, wait 30 minutes and repeat this process two more times. Dough should feel firm and yet soft but not squishy. After the last 30 minute proof, transfer the dough to a dusted countertop. Gently stretch out the dough to make a rectangular shape. Then fold the left edge over to the center and then the right while gently smashing the dough down. Then from the bottom edge roll the dough upward. Then pinch the outer edges and flip it over gently into an oiled loaf pan. Cover and proof for another 2-4 hours for same-day or up to 24 in the fridge. After proofing, preheat oven to 450° F. Once the oven has preheated, uncover bread, make a ¼" deep slice down the center with a sharp knife or bread lame (to score it), however scoring is optional. Spritz, loaf with a bit of water to keep moist then cover with another 9x5 loaf pan (if you don't have a second pan, you may instead use a makeshift "hat" using aluminum foil; mold the foil over the bottom of your loaf pan before you put the dough in). Bake on the second highest rack for 30 minutes then remove top cover and bake for an additional 10-15 minutes. Remove from oven, allow to cool 15 minutes then gently turn loaf out onto a cooling rack (careful, the pan will be hot!). Cool for at least 1-2 hours (until it no longer feels warm) before cutting into it.

Caring For Your Starter

This particular starter recipe came from Germany. It was bred over 400 years ago and its name is 'Black Death'. Although the name sounds terrifying it's actually an excellent starter.

WAKING

A day or two before you plan to bake, take the starter out of the fridge and give it a few feedings at room temperature (about every 12 hours) to 'wake it up'.

FEEDING

Before making bread, feed your sourdough starter with equal parts starter, flour, and filtered water to ensure it's active and bubbly. All purpose flour works best for feeding. Generally the rule is equal parts but I add a tablespoon more flour than water especially when the hooch has built up, it tends to make the starter more watery. Organic flour has only ever been used in this starter. I also like to add a pinch of rye flour, on occasion, it adds a nice bit of tanginess to the flavor. But be sure to compensate for it in the flour portion. (Ex: add 1 tsp of rye to the measuring cup and then measure regular flour).

Always mark the jar at feeding with a marker or rubberband so you can watch its growth to know when it's active enough to use. A strong starter will more than double in size within about 4-6 hours after feeding. Place the jar in a warm place with the lid tilted or a cloth covering to allow the natural gases to escape as the starter ferments.

CONSISTENCY

Consistency varies, as 'thin' (like pancake batter) and 'thick' (like cookie dough or mashed potatoes) starters can both be effective, with the optimal choice depending on personal preference and the type of bread. A healthy starter is characterized by its air bubbles, stretchy texture, and ability to jiggle, stretching away from the jar's sides before the dome collapses. The ideal consistency for an active starter is when it's thick, airy, and full of bubbles, indicating strong gluten development and readiness for baking.

DISCARD

Discarding sourdough starter is a necessary process for managing its growth and keeping it healthy; a portion (half) of the starter is removed before feeding. Discarding prevents the starter from growing too large and unmanageable. It also controls the acidity, and ensures a consistent balance of the wild yeast and bacteria essential for strong fermentation and flavor. This 'discard' can be composted, frozen, refrigerated for later use in recipes like crackers, muffins, pancakes, cookies or fed with a higher ratio of flour and water to create a more robust starter for baking. Always keep a minimum of 2 tablespoons of starter on hand. This is important so you always have some to work with. Never, ever discard it into the sink! If not repurposing the discard, pour it into a plastic bag and throw it away.

STORAGE

To store sourdough starter, feed it (equal parts) and then place it in the refrigerator to slow fermentation, feeding it bi-weekly for short-term storage or weekly before baking. For very long-term storage, dry the starter by mixing it with flour until no moisture remains, or freeze it after a good feeding.

HOOCH

Hooch is a liquid byproduct formed by a hungry sourdough starter that has run out of food, indicating the need for a feeding. It's an alcohol-rich layer that needs to be stirred in. Hooch can be clear, or if the starter has been neglected for a long time, it can turn brown, gray, or even purple or black. This does not indicate the need to throw it away! To prevent hooch, feed your starter more frequently and at the correct ratio of flour and water for its activity level.

SMELL

A normal, active sourdough starter should smell pleasantly yeasty, slightly sour, or even fruity, like bananas or apples. A 'hungry' or 'unfed' starter can have an alcohol, vinegar, or like acetone (nail polish-remover) smell, in which you will need to feed it asap even before you just put it back in the fridge. A very old or sick starter will have an unpleasant, putrid odor or even a pink/orange color, in which case it should be discarded.

TIPS

- Always use organic flour to feed your starter. The gluten concentration is highest in AP flour so it works best.
- The longer you let your dough rest (ferment) the more the gluten breaks down. Overnight in the fridge is the best option for gluten sensitivities.
- If using spelt flour use just a little less water.

Sometimes learning something new can be challenging. But don't be afraid of your new starter, You may make mistakes or even have to start over. Keep trying, don't give up. And the most important thing to remember is to have fun!