

SOURDOUGH STARTER BASICS

How to Create and Care for a Sourdough Starter



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USING NATURAL YEASTS IS THE NATURAL WAY TO MAKE BREAD. Why is it called sourdough, then? Well, when natural yeasts are fermented in flour and water, they break the sugars down and produce acids. These acids lead to a "sour" taste and smell, hence the name "Sourdough". This process both increases nutrients and makes the gluten more digestible, making sourdough bread an excellent choice for everyone.



In order to make this sourdough bread, you need a sourdough starter. So, here is everything you need to know about how start and care for a sourdough starter.

CREATING A STARTER. There are two ways to start your sourdough starter. You can get an established starter from someone else or create your own. The simplest way to start your own sourdough starter is to mix a little flour and unchlorinated water in a bowl. Rye flour seems to work fastest, but you can make sourdough with any flour made from any grain.

Why use unchlorinated water? Chlorine is in the water to kill microbes like yeast, so

if you use chlorinated water, the yeast will not grow. To get unchlorinated water from your city water supply, fill a container with water and let it sit on the counter for 24 hours to off-gas the chlorine before using it. In our house we use a Berkey water filter to dechlorinate all the water we drink and use.

Stir the flour and water mixture three times a day to aerate. Then, use the flowchart to see how to feed and develop your starter until you get to the point of making bread. It will take some time and patience, but yeast is everywhere - you just need to harness it!

STORING YOUR SOURDOUGH STARTER.

The main thing you need is a non-reactive container. This means no metal. I prefer a quart size glass canning jar and covered with a plastic storage cap. I've also used a ceramic crock. Both are fine. I like to stir with a long wooden spoon.



You don't need to clean the inside of your container in between feedings. In fact, I never clean mine. If it has been left in the fridge for a long time, I may clean the

crusty bits that have dried out, but with regular use, the container is better left uncleaned on the inside. I get a starter volcano once in awhile so I clean the outside and rim of the jar, but the inside is left yeasty.

FEEDING YOUR SOURDOUGH STARTER.

The best starter will be maintained if you feed it a high proportion of flour and water.

What that means is you should take out 75%-95% of the starter (sourdough discard—as seen in the picture below) and feed it with fresh flour and water in about the amount that you have removed.



Most recipes call for a certain “hydration” of starter. This is the percentage of the starter that is water. For the most predictable results, you should establish a 100% hydration start.

This requires measuring the weight of the starter, the water and the flour. For most of us, this level of accuracy is nice but not completely necessary. I will give you volume measurements in this instruction, but for more accuracy you can use a digital kitchen scale and weigh all of your ingredients

Simple Sourdough Instructions: Let's say you have 3 C starter in your container.

Remove 2 1/2 C of the starter (save for use in another recipe). Add 1 1/4 C flour and 1 1/4 C water (or equal weights of both). Mix the new flour and water into the starter you reserved in your container. Cover and let sit on your counter for 4-12 hours or until bubbly.

This doesn't mean you always have to have 3 C starter - it just gives you an example showing that most of the starter is removed and you add back flour and water in similar amounts to what you removed.

Sometimes I have more and sometimes I have less. This is much more an art than a science!

FEEDING YOUR SOURDOUGH STARTER: HOW OFTEN?

Ideally, should feed your starter every 2-3 days. If you are not using your starter the day you feed it, put it in the refrigerator until ready to use it again. ALWAYS feed it before you use it for making bread or anything that needs a predictable rise.

If it's been a few days between use, take your starter out of the fridge and pour off any dark liquid that has collected at the top. This is waste from the yeast “eating” the sugars in the flour.

Remove all but 1/2-1 C of starter (like instructed above) and set the extra aside for pancake or other batter.



Feed the remaining ½-1 C with equal amounts flour and water. Stir well and let sit for 4-12 hours until bubbly. Now it's time to use it in bread or other high-rise baked goods.

feed as instructed. It may take two feedings or more before it is bubbly and active again.

If you are going for a prolonged time without feeding the starter, it will be okay for a week or two if you feed it well before taking a break (or vacation) and keep it in the refrigerator.

When you return, pour off the dark liquid, remove the majority of the starter and

Sourdough Starter Flow Chart:

