

How to make a sourdough starter

Day 1

Get yourself a nice large glass jar with a loose fitting lid, a 250ml mold-shaped Weck with its straight sides is ideal. Just remove the rubber ring seal. Start your culture by combining a tablespoon of organic wholegrain rye flour and a tablespoon of filtered water at room temperature (26°C). Mix together well with a wooden or silicone spoon – avoid plastic and stainless steel. Loosely cover, give it a name (essential for success) and leave somewhere warm for 24 hours.

Day 2

When you open your jar there may be a few small bubbles, but don't stress if there isn't – sometimes it can take an extra day. At this stage, you might notice a slightly yeasty tangy smell and this is a great sign that it's working! Add another tablespoon of flour and a tablespoon of filtered water and stir well, then cover and leave in a warm place for another 24 hours.

Day 3

By now you should see some tiny bubbles in the starter, and there will be a stronger smell, a little sweeter, a bit more yeasty, maybe a bit fruity or vinegary. These are signs that you're on the right track to creating a symbiotic culture of lactobacilli and wild yeasts. Add 50g flour and 50g filtered water and stir until combined. Cover and leave somewhere warm for 24 hours.

Day 4

Now things should really be kicking off and you should have lots of little bubbles and may notice some stronger smells a bit like bananas or wheat beer. Add another 50g of flour and 50g of filtered water. Cover and leave in a warm place for 24 hours.

Day 5

There will be loads of little bubbles now and a noticeable increase in volume. Use a rubber band to track this. There might also be a stronger, more acidic smell that is tangy and a bit sweet but still beery. Remove half of the starter to make some space in your jar and either start a backup starter in a separate jar or add to a batch of pancake batter for the best pancakes of your life! Add 50g of flour and 50g of water and mix well, then cover and leave somewhere warm for 24 hours.

Day 6

Tang town! Your starter will really be going for it now, with lots of bubbles and almost doubling in volume. It will have a strong, slightly alcoholic smell from the active fermentation. This will ease off after feeding and become more mild and yogurty. Remove half again to make some space in your jar and have some fun with a sourdough discard recipe, crumpets and English muffins are a couple of personal favorites. Add 50g of flour and 50g of filtered water, and stir to combine. Cover and leave in a warm place another 24 hours, you know the drill. If you want to accelerate the whole process, you can feed every 12 hours now instead of every 24 hours.

Day 7 and onwards

Now you're in business, your starter should be full of life and ready to go! There will be many bubbles now with almost a mousse-like texture, and it should be doubling in size. The starter is now ready to use so get cracking with your first sourdough loaf, but don't expect great results straight away. Your starter will need a bit of time to get established. If you're not going to be using it immediately, you can remove most of the starter and keep only around 50g in the jar. Feed this with 50g of flour and 50g water, then store in the fridge until needed.

See “Sourdough for Beginners” for step-by-step instructions on how to make a simple country style loaf!

Sourdough
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