

Sourdough for Beginners

Making sourdough bread is both a science and an art, but it is absolutely do-able at home! Taking a loaf of real homemade sourdough bread out of the oven and sharing it with your nearest and dearest is such a joy. All you need is a sourdough starter, flour, water, salt and a bit of time. The actual hands-on time is pretty minimal and it can easily fit around your life. You will need a good established starter though! There are lots of guides online for making a starter from scratch, or you can get one from a sourdough baker/bakery or friend, and with a bit of care it will last forever. Once you've got your hands on one you are well on your way to great bread! You can keep your starter in the fridge in hibernation mode until you want to bake, then take out a portion to make a levain and build it up to the right amount for a loaf or two with no waste. Here's a straightforward recipe and an easy to follow schedule to get you started (no pun intended) with making your own beautiful sourdough bread at home.

Beginners Sourdough Bread

The following recipe is for one or two loaves of country style sourdough. The touch of oil helps to keep the bread nice and fresh for a few days, if it makes it that far! It is recommended that you stick to making one loaf for the first few times to build up your confidence and get in some practice before making a double batch. And remember to watch the dough instead of the clock, timings are temperature dependent.

Ingredients	1 x loaf	2 x loaves	Baker's Percentage*
Strong White Bakers Flour	350g	700g	90%
Whole wheat Flour	50g	100g	10%
Water (tepid)	250g	500g	60%
Starter (at 100% hydration)	100g	200g	25%
Salt	10g	20g	2%
Oil	10g	20g	2%
Total:	770g	1540g	189%

* Bakers percentage is relative to the total flour
 (Weight of ingredient/Weight of flour) X 100 = %

Schedule	Step	Instruction
PREP	Build levain:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A day or two before you want to bake take your starter out of the fridge and measure 20g into a clean container to form a separate levain. 2. Add 20g flour and 20g water (100% hydration) to the levain and gently fold in. Cover loosely and leave it at room temperature. 3. Feed your starter, leave it at room temperature for a couple of hours (or until bubbles form) and then put it back in the fridge. 4. After 12-24 hours mix 30g flour and 30g water together, then fold into the levain, cover loosely and leave at room temperature. This can be used for dough anytime in the next 4-24hrs. <p><i>Note: Double the quantities for two loaves. If you already have an active recently fed starter you can skip these steps</i></p>
Saturday	Mix Dough:	Mix the water into the levain, fold in the whole wheat flour and then the white flour until a rough, shaggy dough forms.
	Autolyse:	Cover the dough and rest it at room temperature for 1 hour.
Saturday	Knead dough:	Sprinkle over the salt and mix evenly through the dough, then add the oil and mix on low for 2-4 mins with stand mixer or stretch and fold with wet hands for a few minutes until the dough tightens.
	Bulk proof:	Cover the dough and rest it somewhere warm for 2 hours, stretch and fold after 30 mins and again after 60 mins, then leave to prove for the remaining hour. This may take longer in cooler weather. Once bubbles start to form on the surface and the dough has increased a bit in size then it's ready to be shaped, if not give it another 30mins or so.

Schedule	Step	Instruction
	Shape:	<p>Tip the dough out onto a lightly floured surface. If making a double batch divide the dough in two and scrape each piece into a round with a bench scraper and rest for 10 mins before moving on to the next step. Flatten and shape into a rough ball/boule by folding the edges in to form a square and then folding the corners of the square in towards the middle. Flip the dough over so the smooth side is up, let it rest for 20 mins, shape into a ball again, rest for 10 mins, and then tighten by cupping your hands around the ball of dough and pulling it towards you, or by spinning the dough around on the spot to build tension and form a nice tight skin a bit like a balloon.</p>
	Cold proof:	<p>Place the shaped dough seam side up/smooth side down into well-floured proofing baskets/bannetons or 1L bowls lined with a clean tea-towel, cover loosely, then put on the top shelf in the fridge to cold proof for 12-24 hours.</p>
Sunday	Bake:	<p>Preheat the oven as hot as it will go (at least 240°C) for 30 mins, after 20 mins place a cast iron pot or an oven safe glass casserole dish with a lid in the oven to preheat a little before putting the dough in.</p> <p>Remove the shaped loaf from the fridge, dust with flour and gently turn out onto baking paper seam side down/smooth side up. Dust the loaf with flour, score a shallow X about 0.5cm deep and 10cm long on the top with a sharp serrated knife or bakers lame, spray generously with water, and then carefully place into the pre-heated cast iron pot or casserole. Cover and bake for 20 mins.</p> <p>After 20 mins remove the lid, carefully spray more water on the loaf and inside the oven, then bake for another 20 mins at 220°C until the bread sounds hollow when tapped and the crust is nicely browned. Cool for at least 20mins, slice and enjoy!</p>

Glossary

Sourdough Baking Terms

Autolyze

A step where flour and water (and starter in some cases) are mixed together and allowed to rest before adding the salt. This allows the flour time to fully absorb the water and start developing the gluten.

Banneton

Baskets used during the final rise/proofing of the dough to help maintain the shape and form.

Boule

Traditional bread shape resembling a slightly flattened ball.

Bulk Proof

The first fermentation period of the dough after mixing all the ingredients together.

Hydration

The ratio of water to flour in a sourdough starter or dough recipe. This is calculated by dividing the amount of water by the total amount of flour.

Lame

A very sharp double-sided blade that is used to score the tops of bread loaves in artisan baking.

Levain

A sourdough leavening agent made from a small amount of sourdough mother culture/starter to a larger amount of flour and water, which is used to boost activity before baking.

Score

Making shallow cuts on the surface of the dough just before baking to release steam and control the rise of the bread.

Starter/Sourdough Mother Culture

A mixture of flour and water that contains very active wild yeast, friendly bacteria, and organic acids that is used to leaven bread instead of commercial baker's yeast.

Stretch and Fold

An alternative technique to kneading for developing dough strength where a section of the dough is lifted, stretched, and folded back over the dough.