

Grandmother Sourdough Starter

1 tablespoon (1 packet) yeast (not rapid-rise)

1/2 cup warm water

2 cups all-purpose flour

2 more cups warm water

1 tablespoon sugar or honey

In a large (non-metal) bowl, dissolve yeast in the 1/2 cup of water. Add flour, additional water, and the sugar or honey. Beat till blended. You can leave it in the bowl to ferment, or transfer it to 2-quart jar. You have to use a large bowl or a large jar because the starter needs room to bubble up and expand.

Cover the top with cheesecloth. I use a jar band to keep the cheesecloth on there good. Let stand at room temperature in a warm place while it ferments. Depending on the temperature in your house, it will take 5-10 days to ferment. Stir the mixture 2 or 3 times a day. It should be kinda like pancake batter in consistency (after stirring). It may separate some and look goopy as it sits. Just keep stirring it up a couple times a day. You see how much it expands. That's why you need a large bowl or jar. I like to use this 2-quart jar because later it will transfer easily to the refrigerator. You'll know it's ready when you walk by it one day and think, Is there some beer in here? Once the starter is ready, you can store it in the refrigerator. (Continue to cover with cheesecloth. You can use a rubberband, or a jar ring, etc, but do not seal it shut.) Stir it once a day.

After each use of the starter, replenish it by stirring in another 1/2 cup warm water, 1/2 cup flour, and another teaspoon of sugar or honey. Allow starter to sit out for a day to ferment before putting back in the refrigerator. Wait at least a couple days before using the starter again. If you don't use the starter for 10 days, stir in a teaspoon of sugar or honey to keep it active and stick it back in the fridge.

Never take more than two uses of the starter at a time. Each use is 2/3 cup starter per one loaf recipe. You can take out double that (1 1/3 cups) if making two loaves, and in that case replenish double, but no more than that or you'll wear your starter down pretty quickly. (If you need to make more sourdough bread than that at a time, you might want to run two pots.) You can keep your starter going for a long time if you take care of it. If you don't and if you screw it up, just start over. It's just yeast, water, sugar, and flour. It's okay. Note: Always bring your starter to room temperature before using it in a recipe.