Sourdough Starter

A sourdough starter is the base to every sourdough recipe - rather than using instant yeast as you would use in a traditional bread recipe, sourdough is an activated culture that you make yourself, which acts at the ‘yeast’ but also gives the bread its characteristic tangyness.

It takes around 5-6 days to get it going and active but once it’s ready you’ll be on your way. I use a glass jar with a sealed lid to store mine but anything similar will do, just ensure it is covered.

A few things to note:

- When you begin your starter, you need to feed it every day. Don’t skip a day as these first 5/6 days are pretty key to getting it active.
- Try and feed it at the same time every day so that it has the same 24h feeding cycle.
- Temperature is pretty key, if you live somewhere cold, it can take a little longer to activate so just be patient with it.

Day 1

70g Strong White Bread Flour
20g Wholewheat Flour
10g Dark Rye Flour **Rye flour is amazing for starters as it is full extra nutrients that act like rocket fuel to kick start the process.*
100g Tepid Water (roughly 26C/85F if you want to measure the temperature)

1. Into a glass jar add in your flour and water and mix it together with a spoon until it is evenly combined.
2. Seal the lid on your jar (or simply cover it) and place it in a warm, dry place and leave it for 24h.

Day 2

70g Strong White Bread Flour
20g Wholewheat Flour
10g Dark Rye Flour
100g Tepid Water

1. After 24h you may start to see some evidence of fermentation - little bubbles forming in the jar. Don’t panic if not, it can take 3 days before you see an activity depending on a few different factors.
2. Open up your jar of starter and dump out all of the mixture, leaving only a tablespoon of the mixture in the jar. You now need to ‘feed’ or ‘refresh’ the starter.
3. Add in the fresh flour and water and stir the mixture together until combined. Cover and set aside in a warm place for 24h.

Day 3

70g Strong White Bread Flour
20g Wholewheat Flour
10g Dark Rye Flour
100g Tepid Water

1. We now follow the exact same process as day 2 for the rest of the week. As the days progress you will see the starter becoming more active and bubbly.
2. Dump all of the starter out, leaving 1 tbsp of mixture left in the jar. Top it up with the fresh flour and water and mix it together. Cover and leave it for 24h.

Day 4

70g Strong White Bread Flour
20g Wholewheat Flour
10g Dark Rye Flour
100g Tepid Water

1. Repeat the same process, dumping out the excess starter and feeding it with the fresh flour and water. Cover and leave for 24h.

Day 5

70g Strong White Bread Flour
20g Wholewheat Flour
10g Dark Rye Flour
100g Tepid Water

2. Repeat the same process, dumping out the excess starter and feeding it with the fresh flour and water. Cover and leave for 24h.

Day 6

By the 6th day you should now be seeing much more activity in your starter. You will notice that over a period of 24 hours the starter rises and falls and usually reaches its peak fermentation (or peaks ‘bubliness’) at around 12 hours.

Understanding your starters fermentation cycle or its activity is key, as you want to use your starter to bake with when it is at its peak fermentation i.e it’s strongest point. For example, I know my starter is at its peak 12 hours after I have refreshed it. Therefore if I am going to bake bread in the morning, I will always feed my starter before I go to bed. That will allow my

starter to ferment overnight, ensuring it is active and ready to go or when I bake in the morning.

Hopefully, this gets you going but there is a lot of info here all about starters if you want some more detail.

You can now keep feeding yo starter everyday if youa re going to bake with it, otherwie you can feed it and store it in the fridge. When you are ready to use it, take it out of the fridge and feed it for 2 days before it is active again.

White Sourdough Loaf

Sourdough recipes often talk about ‘Hydration’ which refers to the percentage of water in the recipe out of the total amount of flour. Hydration can typically range from 60% all the way to 100% - however the higher the hydration, the wetter the dough and therefore the more challenging it can be to shape. For this recipe, I have used a hydration of 64% - therefore the water values are very specific. If you wing it and add too much water, it will make the dough slightly harder to work with (it was harder for me anyways!) so try to be as accurate as possible when adding the water,

500g Strong White Bread Flour
298g + 22g Tepid Water
100g Sourdough Starter
10g Salt

1. Start by feeding your sourdough starter the night before you are ready to bake. I feed my starter at 9pm at night, which means by 9am the next day my starter will be ready to go! If your starter is not fully active the bread will struggle to rise so a great test in the morning is to take a glass of warm water and drop a teaspoon of sourdough starter in the water. If it floats, it shows the sourdough starter is active and ready to go!

2. The next morning, add the first part of water into a large bowl along with your active sourdough starter and mix this together with your hands until the sourdough starter has dispersed.

    - **298g Tepid Water**
    - **100g Sourdough Starter**

3. Tip in the flour and mix the dough with your hands until it forms a shaggy mess. We are not looking to knead the dough, we just want to ensure all of the flour and water has been absorbed. Cover the bowl of dough and leave it to rest for 45m.

    - **500g Strong White Bread Flour**

4. After 45m, uncover the bowl of dough and shake the salt on top, along with the second measurement of tepid water. Squeeze the mixture together with your hands to incorporate the salt and water and then roughly shape it into a ball. Again we are not looking to knead the dough, just combine it until all of the water is absorbed. Cover and leave at room temperature for 30m.

    - **22g Tepid Water**
    - **10g Salt**

5. We now need to stretch and fold the dough - instead of kneading it, we use this method to develop the strength in the dough. To do this - lightly wet your hand

shaking off any excess water, and dip it under one side of the dough. Lift up the dough, stretching it out, and then fold this into the centre. Repeat this another 3 times until you have gone all the way around the dough. Initially, it will be quite tough as the dough hasn't relaxed yet but it will become easier as time passes.

6. Once you have done this, cover and rest the dough for 30 minutes. Then, repeat this stretching and folding of your dough every 30 minutes for 4 hours (so a total of 8 stretches & folds). As time passes, the dough should become much more voluminous, and lighter. Once you reach hour 2, be gentle, trying not to knock too much air out of the dough.

7. After 4 hours, very lightly flour your work surface (very lightly - we don't want to add too much flour) and perform one more stretch and fold - this should help to release the dough from the bowl. Carefully lift it out, so the smooth side is facing up and the seam part of the dough is down on the lightly floured surface.

8. We now need to perform the pre-shape. This is key in helping to build strength and tension in the dough. It is hard to explain in writing so here is a great video that explains this process . Essentially you want to use a dough scraper to press the boule of dough away from you, forming a slight oblong - then pull the dough towards you to form a boule. Repeat this about 3 -4 times (watch the video though it is very helpful!) Leave the boule on the work surface and cover it with a tea towel for 30m.

9. Now time for the final shape - the rested dough should've now spread slightly, but not as flat a pancake (if it has gone very flat you will need to do another 'pre shape' to add some more strength to the dough - so just repeat step 8.)

10. Before you shape the loaf, you need to have your basket ready. I use an oval banneton basket lined with a linen cloth. I then dust the cloth with quite a heavy dusting of rice flour and bread flour (equal parts of rice flour and bread flour mixed together)

11. Flour the top the boule and flip it over with your lightly floured hand and dough scraper. Gently flap the dough, stretching it slightly so that it forms a rough rectangle. Take the third of dough that is closest to you and fold it up so that it is halfway up the dough. Take the part that's to the right, stretch it out horizontally, and fold it up so that it reaches the left hand side. Repeat with the left side the side of the dough, stretching it out and folding it over. Then take the edge of dough that is farthest from you and fold this down ever so slightly, tucking it the edges at the top so the dough is as straight as possible. Take the top corner of dough, and pull this across the dough in a stitching motion. Repeat this with the right-hand side, and stitching this over the centre. Work your way down the dough until you have stitched the whole loaf (it is easier to watch in the video!)

12. Finally, take the edge that's furthest from you, fold it down ⅓ of the dough, sealing with with your hand, then fold it down 2 more times until you have cylinder of though.

Quickly scoop the dough up with a floured bench scraper and lift the dough into the lined bread basket, with the seam side facing up.

13. Cove the dough with the linen cloth and place it in the fridge overnight (minimum 12 hours but 24 hours is better)

The Next Day…

1. When you are ready, preheat your oven to 250C/485F with a cast iron pan/large dutch oven heating inside (I use this Lodge Cast Iron Pan). Just before the oven is hot, take your bread out of the fridge and have your razor blade ready.

2. When your oven is hot, remove the cast iron pan from the oven and remove the lid. Immediately tip the bread out of the basket into the centre of the hot pan. Using a razor blade, quickly and confidently, score a deep line along the right-hand side of the loaf. Then along the left-hand side, make small cuts about ¾" in length. Immediately put the lid of your cast iron/dutch oven on top and place the bread into the oven. Reduce the temperature to 235C/455F. Bake for 20m, then remove the lid of your cast iron pan.

3. Bake for a further 25-30m or until the bread is a deep golden colour. Don't be afraid to push the baking time so that it is really nice and golden.

4. Once baked, remove the bread from the oven, lift it out of the cast iron pan and onto a wire cooling rack. Allow to cool for 1 hour before slicing!