San Francisco Sourdough Starter

Tips and Tricks
from Sandy Lowry

Sourdough – Sandy's Notes

This is a sourdough starter that I bought from Sourdoughs International, Inc. They sell sourdough starters from all over the world that have different flavors. This one is supposed to be Original San Francisco Sourdough Culture, Lactobacillus sanfrancisco. You can learn more about the company and this starter at http://www.sourdo.com. They recommend a book on sourdough by Ed Wood called Classic Sourdoughs and included a booklet with my starter that is an excerpt of his book. The booklet is good but I prefer the information copied in this folder from Joe Jaworski's web site. If you want to read another view point Ed Wood's book would be a good start.

Starter = Flour and Water ONLY!

You will find a lot of opinions and advice about sourdough. Most of them are reasonable and work fine. Sourdough is not that difficult and there is a lot of room for variation. The one point to never compromise on is listed above. Your starter should never contain eggs, sugar, milk, dairy or other stuff. I have had some very reputable cook books (Sunset Bread Cook Book) and had friends tell me to put these ingredients in the starter. Our use yogurt to start your own starter. These ingredients can go in the bread, dough or batter, but they shouldn't sit around for long periods of time like the starter does because they putrefy. They also introduce competing micro organisms and compromise the sourdough's own natural ability to fight off other bacteria. It is a good idea to use filtered water, well water, bottle water, anything that doesn't have the chemicals of tap water. Tap water has additives to kill micro organisms. Sourdough is a living colony of wild yeast, AKA micro organism. Don't kill it with tap water.

Bread Flour Matters!

I tried to short-cut buying a special flour for bread. I got dense loaves that tasted good but never approached the store bought breads. I finally broke down and bought bread flour and was amazed at the difference. It is well worth the inconvenience of having to have a different kind of flour on hand.

Keep Your Flour Fresh!

Flour goes rancid and in just a month or two. You can tell by the "old" smell and taste. Unless you are baking very frequently, keep your flour in the fridge or freezer. It will make a very positive difference in the final product.

Preserve your starter.

You never know when something will go wrong and your starter dies or, like me, I once went 4 years between making bread. Enclosed in this printout is Joe Jaworski's method of drying starter to dry flakes. He thinks it will keep for 6 months this way. I kept mine for 4 or 5 years as dry flakes in the fridge and was able to reconstitute them into the starter I use today. You can use the flakes as an easy way to pass starter to friends also.

Buy the Clay Baker.

The clay baker that he recommends works great and makes a HUGE difference in the quality of your loaf, and it is fun too. I bought mine online. I also have a long-loaf metal baker with water reservoir to help steam the loaf. This works great too, but they are no longer being made and cost WAY to much on eBay. I bought mine for like $20 and they want $150 for them on eBay now.

Experiment!
I usually double Joe's loaf recipe so it makes 2 big loaves. If I am going through all the work I want something to show for it! I have also tried some sourdough pancake recipes that I found online. I have tried whole wheat. Sometimes when I am doubling the loaf I get my amounts all mixed up and end up just adding flour until the dough feels right. It all comes out good. It seems to be pretty forgiving. Check out the free recipes on the Sourdoughs International, Inc. web site: http://www.sourdo.com or just Google for fun ideas.

Keeping it Warm.
Joe talks about making a "proofing box" for warming starter and rising the loaves. Or leaving them in the oven with the light on to keep them warm. Well, my oven doesn't get warm enough with just the light on, but, surprisingly, my microwave does! I put the corner of a pot holder in the door so it closes but keeps the light on. The microwave stays at a nice warm temperature that my starter loves. Throw a towel over it because it doesn't like the light and your are good to go. … Teaching family members not to accidentally microwave your pet can be more of a challenge.

Get the Temperature Right.
When adding water to the starter or dough it should be the right temperature. I bought a glass candy thermometer to try to judge the temperature but it was slow and didn't quite go low enough for the 80º that I was looking for. I found that my instant meat thermometer, the one we use for barbecuing, works great. It is fast and it actually measures low enough temperatures to work for this.

Mix and Knead.
I have never been a fan of stand mixers but there is nothing better for sourdough. The dough is very stiff and needs to be kneaded for a LONG time. I use Becky's big KitchenAid mixer. When she moves out I will have to buy my own. With the mixer, all the hard work is done. Without the mixer, you won't need a gym membership any longer, you'll get your work out kneading the bread.

So here is a print out of Joe Jaworski's web site: http://joejaworski.com/bread1.htm

One last note.
He used to recommend optionally adding ¼ teaspoon of ascorbic acid powder to the bread dough to help the bread rise better. I do that and it works great and I figure a little vitamin C can't hurt. Also, I add the optional tablespoon of rye flour to my starter, which is suppose to increase the sour taste. We all love the sour taste so I do that.

Good luck and have fun!

Time Line At-A-Glance

1. **Wake up Stater** - (The morning before you want to eat the bread.)
   If you want the bread for dinner Saturday night and your starter is dormant in the fridge, pull it out Friday morning before work. Follow the directions to add flour and water and put in a warm dark place. (1/4 c. starter, 1/2 c. flour & water). You'll have two containers going at this time. One that is measured to start the bread and your original starter should also be fed and allowed to come to peak before putting it back in the fridge. So you'll have two containers at this point.

2. **Increase Starter** - About 8 hours later (After work - to right before going to bed or 24 hours before eating). Follow the directions. (add 1 c. flour and water.) Leave new container of starter (measured for bread) out but put your regular starter back in fridge. Give it a little flour to tide it over. Put a tablespoon of flour in the starter, latch it down tight, and put it back in fridge. (Never latch starter in tight container unless it is going in the fridge! It will blow up!)

3. **Make Dough**, Kneed, Rise 1- 1.5 Hours (4-5 hours before eating. Around noon for dinner at 6 PM)

4. **Punch Down**, Brief Kneed, Form Loaf. Rise 3-4 hours. (1-2 PM)

5. **Bake**. About 1 hour.

6. **Eat!**

How to Make Authentic San Francisco Sourdough French Bread

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by Joe Jaworski

If you're a bread lover, nothing beats the tangy taste and chewy texture of sourdough bread. From its hard crust to its soft interior, sourdough bread has a unique flavor that is hard to resist. Although traditionally served with shellfish or seafood, sourdough bread can be served with most dishes, including red meats and poultry.

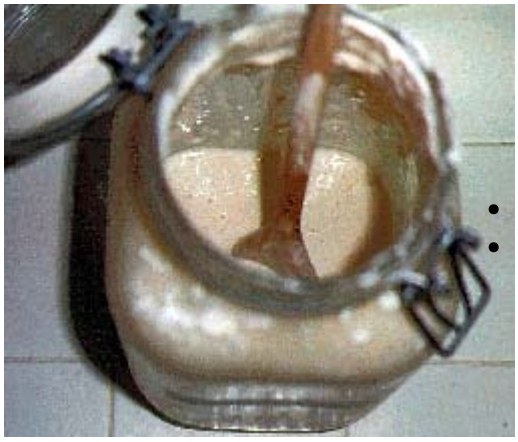
There is no doubt that the best sourdough bread is made from true San Francisco yeast cultures, prepared in the french-style baking method. You probably have tasted this bread in the past, even if you do not live in San Francisco. Many supermarkets now carry prepackaged loaves as well as most major airports in the U.S. However, nothing can compare to the taste of a warm, fresh baked loaf right from your oven.

Over the past year, I have tried many methods to reproduce the flavor of true San Francisco sourdough at home. My goal was to create a bread with equal or superior taste to the famous San Francisco bakeries of Boudin, Parisian, and Colombo. This article describes the process that I have developed that will produce excellent results in any home kitchen. My method is relatively simple, and if you currently bake any kind of yeast breads, you should have little difficulty following my recipe. While the start to finish time of baking this bread takes about 36 hours, there is very little to do most of this time.

Start with a Starter

Regular breads are made with prepackaged yeasts. Sourdough breads are made from a starter. The starter (or sometimes called a sponge) is a flour and water mixture that contains the yeast used to rise the bread. You need a starter to make sourdough bread. To create a starter, you must first obtain some yeast. The only way to bake real San Francisco sourdough bread is to use a yeast culture from San Francisco. You can purchase dried yeast starters at some gourmet cook shops or larger health food stores. If you are associated with a cooking school or club, you might be able to get a bit of someone else's starter to start your own. On the net, Sourdoughs International sells two different San Francisco starters by mail order. In any case, you cannot bake authentic San Francisco sourdough bread with just any sourdough starter, and certainly not with one made from commercial yeast like Red Star or Fleischmann's.

It will take 24-36 hours to make a loaf, so plan ahead. I usually prepare my starter on Friday morning before work for bread that will be ready for Saturday's dinner. If you need more details on the ins and outs of sourdough starters, see my web page The Care and Feeding of Sourdough Starters before proceeding. If you're already baking sourdough but are having difficulties, see my sourdough FAQ for answers to common problems.



About a day and a half before bake time, remove your starter from the refrigerator. Dump out about half the mixture. Next, add the following ingredients:

- - 1 cup (125 g) of bread flour
- - 1 cup (250 ml) of water

Stir the mixture for a few minutes using a wooden spoon (never use metal bowls or utensils with yeast). The idea is to get lots of air into the mixture, which will help the yeast develop. The starter should wind up having the consistency of thick gravy or pancake batter. Do not be overly concerned if there are a few lumps in the mixture.

You need to place the starter in a dark, warm place to promote the fermentation process. A good place is the oven. If you have a gas oven, the pilot light will create enough heat to warm the mixture. For an electric oven, turning on the oven light will supply warmth. DO NOT actually turn on the oven, because even the lowest setting will be too hot for the starter. If it is summertime and air temperatures are 80+ degrees (27C), you can simply keep the starter on the porch covered with a small hand towel.

The starter needs to ferment for about 4-8 hours. If you are familiar with sourdough baking, you know that sourdough starters have a "peak" in their bubbly activity, then tend to go flat or dormant after that. For best results, you want to ferment your starter right up to its peak.

Depending upon how strong or weak your initial starter was, the peak might take anywhere from 3 to 8 hours. With a new starter, check it every few hours or so to get an idea of when your starter reaches its peak. Don't worry if you are too early in the peak. But too late, and your bread won't rise enough.

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Knead Some Dough

Once the starter has peaked, it is now time to make the dough. Plan on doing this step about 16 hours before you actually want to serve the bread. I usually do this at bedtime and let the dough rise all night. In a stand mixer or bread machine, combine the following ingredients:

- 3 cups (375g) of all-purpose flour
- 1/2 cup (60g) of prepared starter
- Up to 1-1/2 cups (325ml) of water (see text)
- 1-1/2 teaspoons (8ml) of salt
- OPTIONAL: 1 tablespoon (15ml) of butter.

This recipe will yield a loaf approximately 2 pounds (1 kg) in size. If you need to make more or less bread, scale the above ingredients accordingly. The butter is optional- it will make the interior more soft/chewy and increase the shelf life, but the crust will be less crispy. If you are a beginner, skip the butter.

If you are using a stand mixer, combine the flour, starter, butter, and 3/4 cups of water in the bowl. Knead the dough using the kneading attachment on the lowest speed and knead for about 3-4 minutes. The dough will look very dry. *The key to good sourdough is the wetness of the dough*. If at this point the dough is so dry that it won't even form a small ball, then add another 1/4 cup of water and knead another minute or so. Now turn the mixer off for 5 minutes. This will allow the water to fully absorb into the flour.

After 5 minutes, turn the mixer back on and add the salt. Knead a few more minutes. The dough should be in a form of a "knarly" or lumpy ball. The dough should just barely stick to your fingers but be mostly dry. If it is too wet, add a tablespoon (15 ml) or two of flour and knead for another minute or two.

After kneading, spray or wipe the inside of a bowl with a little vegetable oil. Place the dough into the bowl. Now flip it over and roll it around to coat the dough ball with the oil. Next, place a piece of plastic wrap over the dough. This prevents the dough from drying out during rise. Cover the bowl with a dark kitchen towel.

I usually let it rise all night, so I just set it on the kitchen counter. If you're in a hurry,

you can place in the oven with the lights on to create a little warmer environment which will speed the rise time. Don't worry if you check on it 6 hours later and it hasn't risen much. It could take 2 hours or 12 hours, depending when you caught the peak of your starter. Once you do this a couple of times, you will get a feel for it. The dough ball should double or triple in size. probably filling the bowl to its brim. It is now ready for the next step.

Form the Loaf

The dough should now be expanded, filling most of the bowl, be full of air, and somewhat wetter then when you last handled it. Remove the plastic wrap and turn the bowl upside down over a floured surface. The dough may collapse and sink down into a flat mess. Don't worry about this.

Sprinkle the top of the dough with some flour and knead the dough gently, using your knuckles or the palm of your hand. The idea is to remove all of the larger air bubbles, while keeping some of the smaller air bubbles intact. Avoid using a roller pin or otherwise flattening the dough. The whole process shouldn't take more that a few minutes. Flip the flat dough over and do the same to the back side. If it is sticking to the surface add a little more flour. As you finish, knead the dough into a small round circle.

At this point, you need to decide whether or not you want to give the dough a second rise. A second rise will increase the sour, tangy taste. I recommend that beginners do not do a second rise because if the yeast is almost exhausted, it won't rise properly. A second rise is done in the exact same way. Place the dough back in the bowl and cover with the plastic wrap, then cover the bowl with a towel. The second rise usually takes at most, half the time of the first rise. In about four hours, the dough will be expanded again filling most of the bowl. Remove the dough from the bowl and do the same procedure. Place onto a floured surface once again and punch down as before. Now form the dough into a ball. To do this, lift the dough from its sides and fold it back to form a ball. Stretch the dough slightly across the front, while tucking it towards the back. Pinch the back of the dough ball to seal the seams. With a little practice, you can turn the dough into a smooth round ball.

The Bakeware

The way to make French and other Artisan breads with a crispy crust is to allow humid, steamy air to surround the loaf during baking. The best way to do this (short of owning your own stone oven) is to use a stoneware or earthenware baking bowl. These are sold online and at many kitchen shops and cooking stores. The one I use is called the "Sassafras La Cloche Brick Oven". They are basically a deep dish pan and cover made of fired clay. I have also seen some made of metal, which I'm sure will work just as good.

The first few times that you use the stone bakeware, spray the inside of the dish with some cooking oil to prevent sticking of the dough. In time, it will naturally become a non-stick surface. Never clean the stoneware using soap. Just scrub lightly and rinse out using hot water.

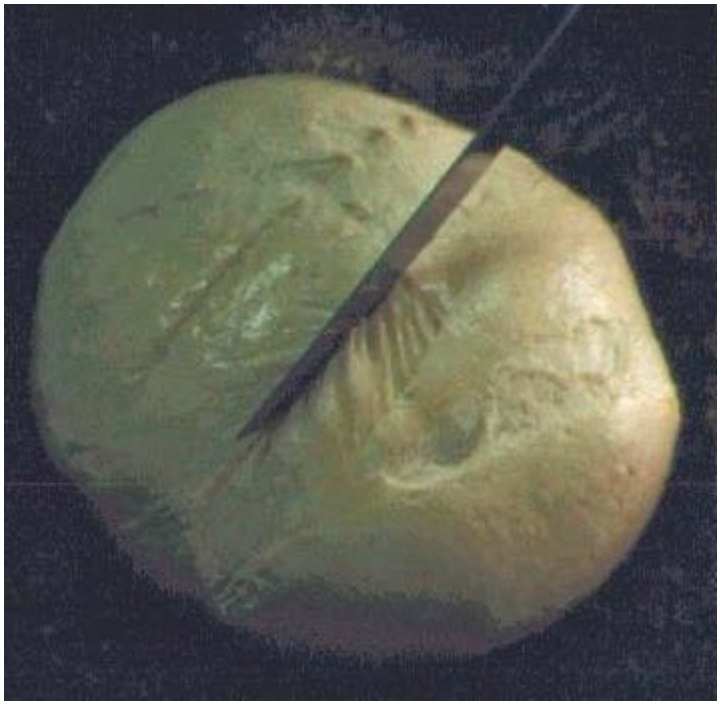
The stoneware bowl is a must-have item and you can't bake artisan bread without it. Below is a comparison of bread baked in stone (right) versus baked on a cookie sheet (left). What I did is made 4 pounds of sourdough and divided it into two loaves. the results are amazingly different, considering that this is the exact same dough and the exact same cooking times.

Bake Away

Sprinkle some yellow corn meal in the dish then place the round ball of dough on it. Put the cover on and set it make in the oven with just the lights on. You should expect a fairly quick rise this time, maybe half or less than the rise time when it was in the bowl.

Using a sharp knife, make 3 or 4 slashes about 1/4 inches deep across the top of the loaf about an inch apart. Make the same 3 or 4 slashes at right angles, forming several squares on the top of the loaf. If the loaf has dried out slightly on top, the knife may drag

against the dough causing it to tear. If this happens, spray the knife with some cooking oil. To increase the steam during baking, you can optionally spray the inside of the cover a few times with water. Place the cover over the dish and place in the center of the oven.



You do not need to preheat the oven. Set the oven temperature for 425 Degrees (220C). This may seem very high, but the heat needs to penetrate the stone. If you have a convection oven, use the convection setting. Bake fore 30 minutes. Now lift the lid and check the loaf. It should be a uniform light brown color. If not, put the lid back on and bake an additional 10 minutes. Now remove the lid, reduce the heat to 375 degrees (190C) and bake an additional 5-10 minutes until the loaf turns a dark, golden brown.

Move the loaf to a cooling rack and let it cool at least 30 minutes. Break out the butter and enjoy!

Well, I tried your method but my loaf doesn't come out like yours.

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What am I doing wrong?

My starter only gets a thin layer of bubbles, then it goes flat.

Try reviving your starter. Dump it all out (except for the small amount that clings to the insides of the jar). Then add 1 cup of flour and 3/4 cups of water. Using 3/4 cup instead of 1 cup of water will also hold the bubbles better and increase the peak time.

My bread rises, but it does so horizontally, resulting in a very flat loaf. Other than this, the bread is tasty.

You've got everything right except the water content of the dough. It's too wet. Simply add more flour. If you're using a stand mixer, after a while you should not have any dough sticking to the bowl, especially at the bottom center of the bowl. If you see a small glob of dough at the bottom, your dough is too wet. If this is not the problem, you are kneading the dough too long, which is damaging the gluten. Don't knead for more than 5-10 minutes.

It's been 12 hours and bread dough is still not rising.

If the starter was bubbly when you made the dough, give it more time. If you use less starter, you will actually wind up with a more sour flavor but it might take 24 hours to get to the first rise. When it doubles in size, punch it down and let it rise again.

My bread rises, but then it falls during baking.

You have left out the salt or have not added enough of it. Salt actually retards rising slightly, but strengthens the gluten so the loaf will keep its shape. Use 1-1/2 teaspoons of salt for every 3 cups of flour.

My bread just doesn't bake right. It turns brown and gets a crust before it rises any in the oven. It just doesn't look like a store bought loaf.

Several things can cause this. Make sure you catch your sponge at it peak, which will help to rise the bread more. Your starter has become too acidic- dump most of it out and start over using a few tablespoons of the old starter. Too much butter- don't use any at all next time to see if this is the problem.

My bread is not chewy enough.

Add some butter, or use a second or even a third rise.

My bread is not crispy enough.

Use less butter and/or reduce the kneading time. When the loaf comes out of the oven, you should hear and see the crust start to crack. This is a good indication of a good crispy crust with the right amount of water and kneading. To save the existing loaf, keep it in the oven as the oven is cooling down to dry out the crust some more.

I slash the top of the bread, but my knife tears and stretches the loaf.

Use a very sharp knife. Spray cooking oil on the knife blade. Some people have good success using a wet razor blade (in France, this is mounted to a holder and called a Lame, pronounced lam). Also, try spraying the loaf with water. But be careful- too much water will flatten out the loaf.

After rising my loaf just became flat, looks a little wet, but has a very strong sour smell.

Too much acid/alcohol in the starter. You need to dump out most of the starter. You can try and revive your starter by dumping all of it out, preserving only the small amount that sticks to the sides of the jar. Add an equal amount of flour and water and let it set and rebuild itself.

My bread is not sour enough.

The sour taste is usually a function of time. The longer you let the bread rise, the more sour the taste. If the yeast culture is very active and you simply can't let it rise any longer, use two or three rises, punching down the loaf in between. You can also add a few tablespoons of white Rye Flour, which will enhance the sourdough flavor.

My bread doesn't brown properly or is not very crispy.

Not enough steam during baking. Fill a spray bottle with water and spray the inside of the stoneware bowl and top of the loaf before baking. Too much butter- don't use butter at all or cut back half of what you're using.

I've tried everything, and I still can't get the dough to rise enough.

The purists out there will probably email me about breaking the "artisan bread rules", but here are two things that will give your dough a strong and fast rise. *Malted Barley Flour*- About 1-2 teaspoons (5-10ml) per 3 cups of flour. This acts as a complex sugar to feed the yeast during the rise. *Apple Cider Vinegar*- This makes the dough more acidic which will strengthen and increase the rise. Use 2-3 teaspoons per 3 cups of flour.

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The Care and Feeding of Sourdough Starters

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by Joe Jaworski

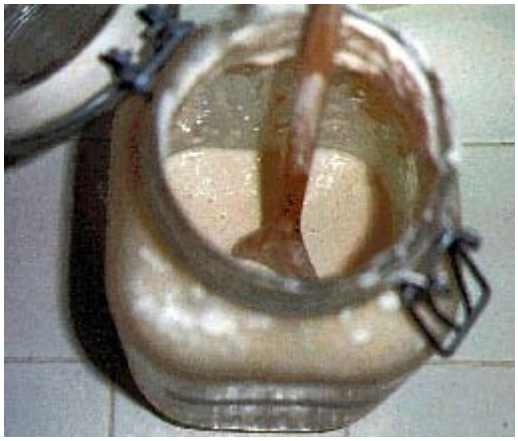
The key ingredient in bread that makes it swell up into a large and delicious loaf is yeast. These living organisms are a type of fungi that are very common throughout the world, and can be found in the atmosphere and on most surfaces. The species and strains of the *Saccharomyces cervisiae* is the exact type of yeast organisms used for fermenting bread and alcoholic beverages such as beer and wine. Many people take yeast as vitamins because it is 50 percent protein and a rich source of B vitamins, niacin, and folic acid.

Most breads baked today use a commercial yeast culture (such as those from Red Star or Fleischmann's) in bread recipes. These types of yeasts have been genetically engineered for taste and more importantly, for repeatable, stable performance. Before commercial yeasts were available, wild yeasts were used for all bread baking. These yeasts are called sourdough yeasts. In a sense, all breads were once sourdough.

The sourdough or wild yeasts have very different characteristics than the genetically manufactured varieties. Sourdough yeasts can survive a much wider temperature variation, can live in acidic environments (the tangy taste), and can remain dormant for a much longer time period. They also taste very different; giving sourdough breads their unique flavor and chewy texture.

Purchasing Sourdough Yeast

Most larger health food stores and gourmet shops sell sourdough yeasts in dry form. These sourdoughs are typically marketed by region of origin (i.e., San Francisco, Yukon, Middle East, etc.) and can vary tremendously in characteristics and taste. On the net, Sourdoughs International sells different types of starters by mail order. If you are new to sourdough baking, I recommend that you start by trying one of these. This will give you a good feel for working with sourdough yeast and learning about its baking characteristics.



Once you have your sourdough starter thriving, you never need to buy it again. To culture any dried yeast, add it to a 50 - 50 mixture of flour and water. Start out with one cup of water and one cup of bread flour. Stir vigorously to try and get some air into the mixture. Place the mixture in warm place (an oven with a pilot light or its light bulb turned on works well). Let it sit for 2 - 6 hours. The mixture should become very bubbly.

After removing the quantity needed for the recipe, feed the yeast before placing it back into the refrigerator. Add about 1/4 cup of water and 1/4 cup of flour and stir. Seal the jar tightly and place in the refrigerator. This will preserve your starter until the next time you need it. I have left starter in the refrigerator this way for up to a month with no problems. If you must go longer than this, remove the jar every few weeks or so, dump out most of starter, and add another 1/4 cup of flour and water to the mixture. Caution: NEVER keep you starter tightly closed while it is out of the refrigerator. The gases will build up pressure and may cause the jar to burst.

Using this procedure, you can keep your starter alive indefinitely. However, every few months or so your starter jars will acquire caked-on flour near the top of the jar. This could get moldy and ruin the starter. I usually wash out the jars every few months to prevent this, carefully saving the starter in another jar during the washing, then returning it to the jar and to the refrigerator.

Preserving your Starter

It is a good idea to preserve some of your starter in case something goes wrong. If your starter dies, you will have to purchase or get some more yeast and start over. Some people keep two batches going at once, but I have developed a method that can be used to preserve the starter for a long time without constantly adding flour or water. This method also makes it easier to share your starter with your friends.

During the normal course of preparing your starter for bread baking and when it is active and bubbly, add flour and yeast as normal for its next feeding. But before returning it to the refrigerator, pour a few ounces of the starter onto some wax paper and spread it out it with the back of a spoon so that the starter forms a thin layer on the wax paper. Let it completely dry out overnight. The next day, bend the wax paper and the starter will break apart like potato chips. Place the starter chips in a plastic zip lock bag sealed tightly and then into the refrigerator. It is also a good idea to write the date and type of yeast on the outside of the bag.

I have kept starter this way for up to six months with no ill effects, though I suspect you can probably go up to year. To reactivate it, place the starter chips in equal amounts of flour and water and put it in a warm place for 12 hours. I make these starter chips about twice a year to ensure I have a fresh backup for all my sourdough starters.

Stalking the Wild Yeast

As an alternative to purchasing yeast cultures, you can capture a wild yeast right in your own backyard. You may discover a delicious and wonderful sourdough unknown to the world! You may also discover a bland one. Either way, give this a try because it's fun and will add a little adventure to your baking.

To capture wild yeast, place one cup of bread flour and one cup of water in a glass jar. Cover the jar with a fine mesh (a knee-hi stocking works well) to let air in but keep bugs out. Place the jar outside where it can receive some fresh air and some breezes. Best location is a shady spot. Let it set for three or four days. Stir one or twice a day. If it is cool outside (

35F(2C) to 60F(16C)) you will see very little or very low activity in your starter until you bring it indoors and warm it up. If it is less than 35 deg F, wait until warmer weather before trying to capture yeast. If the starter turns pink or dark grey in color, it has become moldy and you should discard it.

If you see no bubbles in the mixture after a few days, discard it and try again. If you see a layer of bubbles on the surface of the mixture, congratulations! Feed the yeast with another cup of flour / water mixture and let it ferment indoors for another 12 hours or so. After that, try an experimental loaf. Even though you may not live in a place famous for sourdough, you will be surprised how tasty native yeast can be.

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Authentic San Francisco Sourdough Recipe

Using a Willow Basket with Machine Mixing

Makes one loaf

3¼ cups (400-460 grams) unbleached all-purpose flour
1 cup fully active Original San Francisco culture from the culture proof
1 cup water
1 ½ teaspoons salt

This simple recipe uses our Original San Francisco culture. It will introduce you to the three proof method and you will never bake sourdoughs any other way. Use it to get familiar with how different proofing temperatures and times achieve your desired flavor, crust and crumb. These directions produce what **I like**. You can easily change them to do what **you like** and, if you prefer, do it all by hand.

The Fully Active Culture
There is no single ingredient more essential for sourdough success than the Fully Active Culture. When it comes from the refrigerator it is semi-dormant, the degree depending on how long it has been there. Start by checking the odor. If less than a week, it will be bland and unremarkable and ready to be warmed and fed and used in the culture proof. If longer, in the fridge, it may smell acidic from action of the lactobacilli and should be "washed" briefly by filling the jar with water while mixing vigorously then discarding all but about 1-2 cups. This is then fed sufficient flour and water to form a thick pancake consistency and is proofed (fermented) until it forms a layer of foam and bubbles 1-2 inches thick. When it does that within in 2-4 hours after the last feeding, it is ready to use in the culture proof. If more than a week or two in the fridge, it may take several feedings and an occasional washing to do the same thing. Plan ahead. I'm asked occasionally "Why proof a fully active culture? Why not just use it? " The answer is important. The culture is proofed because it is the first opportunity for the baker to significantly change the final outcome of the finished product by regulating the proofing temperature. (The flour and water used to make the fully active culture are not included in the above recipe.)

The Culture Proof
Producing a massive inoculum of sourdough organisms is the primary purpose of this proof. Mix a cup of fully active culture with sufficient flour and water to form a thick batter and proof it for 6-8 hours. If you want a more sour flavor, the temperature should be 75-80°F for the entire time. If you prefer a more mild flavor, proof at 65-70°F. I prefer to do both and proof at 65-70°F for the first 2-3 hours and at 75-80°F for the remaining time.

The Dough Proof
Place the flour, fully active culture (from the culture proof), water and salt in the machine pan and mix-knead for approximately 20-25 minutes. The dough should form a soft but firm ball which drags on the sides of the pan. If it doesn't, add flour or water gradually until it does. Then cover with a lightly oiled plastic secured firmly to the pan with a rubber band (it may over flow the pan) and proof overnight at room temperature, 65-70°F, for 10-12 hours with the pan either in or out of the machine (I take it out). You can put it in your proofing box at higher temperatures if you prefer. The next morning remove the plastic cover, return the pan to the machine and turn it on. In approximately 30 seconds the machine will reform a firm, uniform ball. Tip the pan over a lightly floured board and with a plastic spatula ease the ball from the pan to the board leaving the paddle in the pan (this takes practice). Let the dough rest for 20-30 minutes to relax the gluten.

Shopping Menu

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Baking Sourdough Bread

Sourdough bread can be baked in your own kitchen using our authentic sourdough cultures (starters) and the methods and sourdough recipes in our book Revised Classic Sourdoughs. Nothing tastes better than authentic sourdough bread.

The Loaf Proof

The willow basket is lightly brushed with rye flour to help prevent the dough from sticking when you remove it for baking. After multiple uses the baskets may need to be cleaned with a stiff brush.

The dough on the floured board should partially hold its shape if the consistency is correct. If it doesn't, you may want to knead in a little additional flour until it does. After the "rest" use a dough scraper to gather up the dough from the board and form a more or less round ball by pinching the "corners" together. Wetting your fingers with a little cold water helps. Transfer the dough ball to the basket with the "corners" up and complete sticking them together. Cover the basket with lightly oiled plastic and place in your proofing box or proof at room temperature. In 2-4 hours depending on the temperature the dough should rise above the rim of the basket and is ready to bake. The dough is transferred to the baking sheet by first tipping it from side to side to dislodge sticking spots near the top then upended over the sheet. If the dough sticks deeper in the basket, it can usually be dislodged by simply holding the basket upside down over the sheet until the weight of the dough pulls it loose.

Baking

There are two schools of thought and they can't be any different. The first preheats the oven to 500°F or more then bakes the dough on a pizza or similar stone for 20-25 minutes. The second, "my way", starts with the dough in a completely cool oven on a heavy cookie sheet or similar base. I then set the oven to 375°F and turn it on to bake for 1 hour and 10 minutes. That final 10 minutes is to compensate for how long it takes the oven to reach 375°F. You can, of course, do it either way. I think "my way" actually produces slightly better "oven spring" and I don't like handling the hotter stones and pans.

Commercial San Francisco bakers have used a form of steam injection to increase the humidity in their ovens for a very long time and some probably still do. There are a number ways we home bakers can increase the humidity, none quite as good, but better than nothing, perhaps. Most common is the fine mist from a spray bottle which is used several times for the first 10 minutes or so as the oven heats. It should be directed to the interior of the oven not on the surface of the dough. Many of us also use a pan of boiling water placed immediately below the baking loaves for a few minutes. When baking is complete the loaf is transferred to a cooling rack where it should be admired for 20-30 minutes before cutting.

No related items.