

Sourdough Starter

For smaller batch:

1/2 Cup flour

1/4 Cup filtered water

For larger batch:

1 Cup flour

1/2 Cup filtered water

NOTE: I use 100% whole wheat flour, white flour doesn't enter our home – for this recipe, I notice I need to add a bit more water than the typical recipe calls for. Whole wheat flour can be a bit dry.

Mix ingredients together in a clean glass jar. Ensuring your container is large enough to accommodate starter as it grows. Make sure all dry powder is mixed well into the water. Cover with a breathable cover such as a piece of clean linen or paper coffee filter, using a rubber band to hold it in place. Allow to sit at room temperature (ideal temp is around 68F) for 24 hours.

If starting in spring, summer or fall, anywhere in the kitchen is generally warm enough. Some may have a home that is drafty or chilly in winter months. During this time, I often place my jar on top of the refrigerator or upright freezer where it is a bit warmer.

DAILY your starter will need to be fed. To feed your starter, remove approximately half of it into another container. Set aside that portion to use in making something from the list of ideas. We never throw it away!

To the portion left in your jar, add the same proportions of flour and water as you started with. Mix well, ensuring all the powder is blended in. Re-cover and set aside in warm place to feed for 24 hours.

You will feed your starter for 7-14 days like this, depending on how productive it is. In spring and summer, our new batch of starter is very active, very swiftly – it takes about 7 days to be great for a batch of bread! Winter, it generally takes a good 10 days to reach the same results. Each day, you will be setting aside a portion as “discard,” leaving about 1/2 cup in the jar to be fed. By day three or four, you will likely start to see some activity in the form of bubbling. It should have an almost fresh-fruity-fermenting fragrance to it. Some say it smells sour-ish. It should also be starting to show some signs of expansion a few hours after being fed.

NOTE: At this point, it is often recommended to start feeding the starter TWO times a day – each spaced as equally apart as possible. Those who do this, will continue doing this until the starter is very active. I have never had to do the double feedings as my starters have always gotten very active early on. I am always grateful for this because I don't know what I would do with that much discard!

After the 7-14 days, your starter should have a fresh, but tangy aroma which may be a bit acidic. Yet this will be a pleasing scent, not overpowering. Once it has reached this “ready” stage, give it one last feeding by saving 1/2 Cup of starter in the jar and mixing in your proportions of flour and water. Using the discard wisely to make another delicious bread dish.

This will be the time you transfer it into its more permanent container. A clean crock, jar, or plastic tub. You will want the lid to fit somewhat loosely so that it can off-gas freely without breaking your jar or container. Store in refrigerator.

Every 7 days you will want to feed your starter again by removing a bit for discard, then adding 1 scant cup of flour and 1/2 cup of water to the starter. Mix well.

These Seven-day feeding cycles are PERFECT timing for your starter to be used for a fresh loaf of Shabbat Bread, by the way!!! You don't have to ONLY use your starter every seven days, you may use it as often as you wish throughout the week. Just remember to remove some as "discard" and that will be used for whatever bread product you are in need of that day. Feed the balance in the crock or jar, and replace in the fridge!!!

Discard Recipes

Whole Wheat Crackers

1 cup Whole Wheat Flour

1/2 teaspoon sea salt

1/2 - 1 cup sourdough starter discard

4 tablespoons butter, room temperature

oil, for brushing

coarse salt (such as kosher or sea salt) for sprinkling on top

Instructions

In a large bowl, place flour, salt, sourdough starter, butter and mix to make a smooth, but not too sticky dough. Add a little more flour, a little at a time if necessary. Divide dough in half. Cover with plastic wrap or damp cloth. Refrigerate to let rest for 30 minutes. Preheat oven to 350°F. On lightly floured parchment, roll each half into a rectangular, 1/16" thick. The dough may have uneven edges, but these can be trimmed off, if desired. Brush lightly with oil, sprinkle with coarse salt, if desired.

Cut the dough into 1 1/4" squares; a pizza wheel works best for cutting. Prick each square with the tines of a fork.

Baking time will be 20 to 25 minutes, until the squares are slightly brown around the edges. Halfway through, turn the baking sheet partway around in the oven. This will help the crackers brown a bit more evenly. When fully browned, remove from the oven. Allow to cool slightly, then slide the parchment onto a cooling rack to finish cooling.

After cooling, crackers may be stored in an airtight container for up to one week. May be frozen if longer storage is desired. But these never last that long at our home!

Great served with dips, spreads, cheeses, hummus, the same as you serve all store-bought crackers!

For variety: While mixing the dough, you may add 2 tablespoons of your favorite dried herbs. Garlic and rosemary are delicious.

Note: Because we use 100% whole wheat flour, I sometimes find we need to add a little extra WATER and not flour to get the right consistency to the dough.

Basic Whole Wheat Bread dough

4-6 Cups Whole Wheat Flour

1 Cup sour dough discard

1 scant tsp salt

- enough liquid to make a soft, but not too sticky dough (1 Cup to 1 1/2 Cups depending on amount of flour used)

Place 4 cups of whole wheat flour into large mixing bowl. Add 1 Cup sourdough starter (discard) and salt. Gently mix with a wooden spoon or spatula. If it appears you need to add more water to get the flour to fully mix in, add more water as needed. When the dough is ready to be kneaded, turn out onto lightly floured surface and knead for 8-10 minutes by hand.

MIXER METHOD: When dough is ready to be kneaded, place mixer bowl on mixer stand and knead with mixer 5-8 minutes on low (kneading) speed.

Remove dough from mixing bowl and allow to rest while you prepare your baking pan(s).

Process or prepare your dough into your desired end-product from the list below! Follow baking directions for each individual product.

Basic Wheat Bread

Choose your baking pan. Oil the pan well to prevent loaf sticking. For wheat bread, shape into desired loaf. This recipe is best for an 8-inch loaf pan or some form of artisan bread. For a 9-inch loaf pan, it is better to use the larger recipe with SIX cups of flour. After placing loaf onto/into your baking pan, oil the top of the loaf.

Cover with a damp cloth or towel – I use a damp linen napkin. Allow to rise until double. On warmer days, this may only take 4-5 hours. On chilly days, it can take up to 8 hours. Remember to take this into consideration when mixing up your dough. If desired for breakfast or brunch, it is best to mix the loaf up and place it in the pan the night before, allowing it to rise over night, and bake in the morning.

Bake in a 350F oven for 35-55 minutes. I have always used the “thump” test on the top of the baked loaf. When thumped, the loaf should make an almost hollow sound. If it sounds still solid, it may not be baked all the way through. Place back into the oven for 5-7 minute additional minutes. If loaf is browning too much, you may cover with a foil or parchment “tent” to reduce browning while it continues baking.

When done, remove from oven and allow to cool for 5-10 minutes in the pan. Remove from pan, and allow to cool on wire rack if delayed serving is desired. If it is for an immediate meal, you may slice and serve warm from the oven! Delicious!

Makes one loaf. Feeds 4-8 people.

Dinner Rolls

Choose shape of desired dinner rolls and the proper baking pan. A couple of ideas:

For Garlic Knots, a cookie sheet or 13X9 baking pan will work. For a smaller batch, a 9X9 square baking pan works, too. Cut dough into 12-24 individual, even pieces. Roll each piece into a 8 inch "tube" of dough. Take each and tie it into a knot, tucking the bottoms of the ends under the roll and place it in the baking pan. Do this with each piece of dough. The rolls should have enough space around them to rise until doubled, about 3/4 to 1 inch between each. Brush with melted garlic butter and allow to rise, covered with a damp towel, until doubled. About 2-4 hours. Bake in 350F oven for 15-20 minutes, until done. It usually takes about 16 minutes up here. Remove from oven, brush with more melted garlic butter, and serve hot.

For clover leaf rolls, you will need a muffin pan. Oil each muffin cup. Cut dough into 12 individual pieces. Take each piece and cut into 3 or 4 small pieces. Roll each into a nice ball, and place 3-4 balls into each muffin cup. Brush each with oil. Cover with a damp cloth. Allow to rise until doubled, 2-4 hours. Bake in 350F oven until done, 12-20 minutes. Brush with melted butter or more olive oil. Serve warm. GREAT with soups!

Regular Dinner rolls, using a 9-inch round or square pan, oil the bottom and sides well. Cut dough into 12 even pieces. Shape each piece into a round ball and place evenly spaced in prepared pan. Brush with oil and cover with a damp cloth. Allow to rise in warm location until doubled, about 2-4 hours. Bake in 350F oven for 15-20 minutes, until baked through. Brush with melted butter and serve warm.

Buns (Hamburger or Hot Dog)

HB Buns: Using a 9-inch round or square pan, oil the bottom and sides well. Cut dough into 12 even pieces. Shape each piece into a round ball and place evenly spaced in prepared pan. Brush with oil and cover with a damp cloth. Allow to rise in warm location until doubled, about 2-4 hours. Bake in 350F oven for 15-20 minutes, until baked through. Remove from oven and allow to cool for 10 minutes in the pan. Remove from pan and allow to cool on cooling rack. Slice in the middle to serve hamburgers, Sloppy Joes, or other sandwich foods.

HD Buns: Using a 13X9X2 pan, oil the bottom and sides well. Cut dough into 12 even pieces. Shape each piece into a torpedo tube style roll and place evenly spaced in prepared pan. Brush with oil and cover with a damp cloth. Allow to rise in warm location until doubled, about 2-4 hours. Bake in 350F oven for 15-20 minutes, until baked through. Remove from oven and allow to cool for 10 minutes in the pan. Remove from pan and allow to cool on cooling rack. Slice in the middle to serve hotdogs, sausages, Sloppy Joes, or other sandwich foods.

Pizza Crust

Cut your dough in half and allow to rest for about 10 minutes while you prepare the baking sheets. Using your hands, press your dough into a 12-14 inch circle. Oil the top of the dough. Cover with damp linen or cloth and allow to rise for 2-4 hours. Bake in 400-425F oven for 8-10 minutes. Remove from oven and top with favorite toppings. Place back in oven to bake for an additional 5-10 minutes to heat all toppings through and to melt cheese. This will also cook the dough the rest of the way through. When toppings are heated through and cheese is as you desire, remove from oven. Allow to sit for 5-8 minutes. Slice into pizza slices and serve!

Bagels

Bagels are a little different than other bread products, but still easy peasy! For these, you want to mix up your dough, just as in the basic recipe. Shape your bagels by cutting the dough into 12-24 even pieces. Take each piece and roll it into a ball.

Placing each ball onto your greased baking sheet, take your thumb or finger into the center of your ball, pushing down, form a hole in the middle. Make sure the hole isn't TOO large but is large enough that it will stay open as your dough rises. You won't be able to "re-do" the hole later. Make certain there is at least 1 inch of space between the bagels to allow for distance for rising.

Brush with oil and cover with a damp towel. Allow to rise 2-4 hours, until doubled in bulk.

After risen, prepare to par-boil your bagels. Set up a cooling rack close to your stove for draining bagels. I usually take the damp linen and place it under the rack to catch the drips.

In a 3+/- inch deep skillet, fill to 3/4 inch of the top edge with water. Add 1 tsp salt. Bring skillet of water to a boil on your stove top. With a sharp knife, gently cut apart any bagels which might have risen together, being very cautious not to "deflate" your bagels. A straight down motion rather than sawing works best to protect them.

With a slotted spatula, gently remove bagels from the baking sheet, one at a time, and place into boiling water. Only do about 4 bagels at a time at the most. If your pan only fits three, then do three. You want to leave enough space between them to be able to easily flip them. Boil on the first side 30 seconds, gently flip them, and boil for another 30 seconds. Remove from pan and drain on cooling rack. Do this until all bagels are boiled.

Place bagels back onto baking sheet. If topping are desired, brush with egg wash and sprinkle with toppings of choice. If no topping, but the glossy look is desired, brush with egg wash alone.

Place in 350F oven and bake for 15-20 minutes. Remove from oven, cool on wire rack for a bit. Serve hot from the oven like this or allow to cool completely and serve later. They are always better that first day! The second day they can sometimes get a little "tough" but are still tasty with cream cheese!

NOTE: Recently, I made the smaller batch of dough and divided it in half to make garlic knots AND bagels. I was able to get 8 garlic knots and 8 bagels from the small batch of dough.

Bagels sound like they take a lot of time and are complicated, but once you get the hang of it, the actual time you are involved in the process is minimal – limited to the kneading, shaping and boiling. They do the rest pretty much on their own!

MORE RECIPES ON THE NEXT PAGE!!!

Soft Pretzels

Soft pretzels are similar to bagels. So, shape as desired! We love to eat soft pretzel bites, sticks, or wonky shaped pretzels (mainly because I don't shape them very professional looking!) Brush with oil, cover with damp linen and allow to rise until double. Process like bagels in the boiling water bath, except only do for a total of 60 seconds.

Pretzel bites and logs rarely need to be turned over, while pretzel shapes will need to be flipped. They will get 30 second on each side. Remove and drain, replace onto baking sheet and bake until done. Small pretzel bites take about 15 minutes, logs take about 18-20 and regular pretzels can take 20-25 – all at 350F.

Remove pan from oven, cool slightly and serve warm with mustards or dips of choice! Great with cheesy dips, Tex-Mex cheesy dips, salsas, Ranch dressing, spicy mustard, or yellow mustard.

Cinnamon Bread

When the dough is done kneading, allow to rest 5 minutes. On parchment, lightly floured or oiled, roll the dough into a 10 by 12 inch rectangle (or 18 if you want more swirl!). Spread softened butter over the dough, coming within 1/2 inch of all edges. (I use my clean hands because the warmth helps spread the butter more evenly!). Leaving about 1/2 inch of untouched dough around the edges, sprinkle with cinnamon sugar mixture – we prefer less sugar, so I leave this “as desired” for your tastes.

Starting at one of the 10 inch sides, begin rolling up the dough, pressing the edges together when all rolled up. Place dough into prepared loaf pan. Oil the top, cover with damp cloth and allow to rise until doubled, 2-4 hours. Bake in 350F oven for 35-55 minutes, until done. Using the thump test mentioned in the original directions.

Remove from oven, allow to cool slightly before removing to a cooling rack. Buttering the top makes this loaf extra special. When cool, you can also drizzle with your favorite powdered sugar glaze. Serve!

Variation: You can also sprinkle chopped walnuts or pecans in with the cinnamon before rolling up loaf. Another delicious treat is diced apples or raisins with the nuts. Use your imagination!

Cinnamon Rolls

For cinnamon rolls, follow directions for the cinnamon loaf, except start at the TWELVE INCH side to roll it up into a roll. Do not tuck the ends in on themselves. Using a knife or thread, slice roll into 12 even pieces. Place these 12 into a well-oiled baking dish with 2 inch sides. Cover with a damp cloth and allow to rise until doubled, about 2-4 hours. Bake in 350F oven for 18-25 minutes. Remove from oven. Allow to cool slightly, you can either leave them in the pan for serving, or try dumping them onto a serving plate. Then frost with your favorite powdered sugar icing and serve warm.

Muffins and Pancakes

If we have “discard” available and we are all “breaded out” I have been known to use the discard to make muffins or pancakes. Using your favorite muffin or pancake recipe, mix together all ingredients EXCEPT LIQUID – do not measure out your milk or other liquids as yet. Instead, add your sourdough discard to the bowl of ingredients. Begin to mix it together, then, as needed, add milk or other liquid until you reach the proper consistency for batter.

Cook as usual for muffins by measuring into prepared muffin cups.

Cook as usual for pancakes in your prepared frying pan or griddle.

Serve!

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Tips from our Bakers

Why do you need to discard half the starter? It seems so wasteful... But unless you discard starter at some point, eventually you'll end up with a very large container of starter. Also, keeping the volume down offers the yeast more food to eat each time you feed it; it's not fighting with quite so many other little yeast cells to get enough to eat. You don't have to actually discard it if you don't want to, either; you can give it to a friend, or use it to bake. There are quite a few recipes on our site using "discard" starter, including pizza crust, pretzels, and waffles, and even chocolate cake. If you're still uncomfortable dealing with discard, though, try maintaining a smaller starter: the smaller the starter, the smaller the amount of discard.

Why does this starter begin with whole-grain flour? Because the wild yeast that gives sourdough starter its life is more likely to be found in the flora- and fauna-rich environment of a whole-grain flour than in all-purpose flour. What if all you have is all-purpose flour, no whole wheat? Go ahead and use all-purpose; you may find the starter simply takes a little longer to get going. Also, if you feed your starter on a long-term basis with anything other than the all-purpose flour called for here, it will probably look different (thicker or thinner, a different color) and act differently as well. Not to say you can't feed your starter with alternate flours; just that the results may not be what you expect.

Want to put your starter on hold for the summer, or as you go on vacation? Here's how: Drying your sourdough starter.

Should you use bottled water? Unless your tap water is so heavily treated that you can smell the chemicals, there's no need to use bottled water; tap water is fine.

A note about room temperature: the colder the environment, the more slowly your starter will grow. If the normal temperature in your home is below 68°F, we suggest finding a smaller, warmer spot to develop your starter. For instance, try setting the starter atop your water heater, refrigerator, or another appliance that might generate ambient heat. Your turned-off oven — with the light turned on — is also a good choice.

One of our readers offers the following thoughts about the duration of everyday feeding, which we think is great advice: "Conditions vary so widely that 7 days can be far too little. I've learned the key is to watch for a dramatic and consistent rise in the jar — at least doubling between 1 and 4 hours after feeding. This could be 7 days or less after you begin, or it could be three weeks (for me it was 12 to 14 days). I would encourage you to consider tweaking your wording a bit to guide bakers to watch for this phenomenon, rather than watch the calendar." Thanks, Ken!