

What Is Sourdough Bread

Sourdough is slow-fermented bread. It's unique because it *does not* require commercial yeast to rise. Instead, sourdough bread is made with a live fermented culture (a sourdough starter) which acts as a natural leavening agent.

Sourdough is known for its characteristic tangy flavor, chewy texture and crisp, crackly crust.

Health Benefits of Sourdough Bread

- 1) Digestion - Sourdough bread is high in prebiotics and fiber, which feeds the good bacteria in your gut. This can lead to improved digestion and gut health.
- 2) Blood sugar - Sourdough bread has a lower glycemic index, which means it has a slower effect on blood sugar levels than other breads. This can be beneficial for people with diabetes or those looking to regulate their blood sugar.
- 3) Nutrients - Sourdough bread contains healthy carbs, protein, fiber, iron, and vitamins like folic acid. It also has higher levels of folate and antioxidants than other breads.
- 4) Serotonin - Sourdough bread contains serotonin, a mood-boosting chemical that can help you feel happier and more relaxed.
- 5) Preservatives - Sourdough bread contains no added preservatives. The enzymes produced by friendly bacteria act as natural preservatives to prevent mold and fungus growth.
- 6) Nutrient absorption - Sourdough bread's lower phytate levels allow your body to absorb the nutrients it contains more easily.

Potential Risks of Sourdough Bread

- 1) Contamination – The sourdough starter can develop contamination. Your sourdough starter may be contaminated if it never bubbles, develops green, pink, orange, or black patches. Throw the starter away if it is exhibiting any of these qualities
- 2) Sourdough bread is lower in gluten, but it is not gluten free. People with a gluten intolerance may find that sourdough bread is easier to digest, but people with celiac disease will likely experience symptoms if they eat sourdough bread.

Sourdough Starter Basics

Before you begin baking sourdough bread, you will need a sourdough starter. A sourdough starter is a live culture of natural yeasts and bacteria made from flour and water. Once combined, the mixture will begin to ferment, cultivating the naturally occurring wild yeasts and bacteria present in the mixture. A small portion of this culture is used to make your bread dough rise.

- 1) There are many sourdough starter recipes available from various sites on the Internet. These sites provide step by step instructions on creating your own sourdough starters.
- 2) There are sourdough starter kits available on Amazon as well as sourdough starter that is alive and must be fed immediately upon delivery. Some of these starters claim to be over 200 years old and are used to make a “San Francisco Sourdough Bread.”
- 3) There are many people that will share a portion of their sourdough starter with you so that you can avoid the lengthy process of making your own starter or the cost associated with purchasing a starter.

Ongoing Care and Feeding of your Sourdough Starter

Just like any living creature, sourdough starter must be kept alive with regular feeding and proper storage to maintain its strength. Many bakers don't realize that you can't just create leave your starter on the counter and expect it to work on a moment's notice. You'll need to feed it every time prior to making bread dough. This is referred to as “activating” your starter. Then, to keep it alive, you'll need to maintain it with regular ongoing feedings to keep it strong.

- 1) **At Room Temperature:** If you bake often, store your starter at room temperature. This will speed up fermentation, making the starter bubbly, active, and ready to use faster. Room temperature starters should be fed one to two times a day, depending on how quickly they rise and fall.
- 2) **In the Fridge:** If you don't bake that often, store your starter in the fridge covered with a lid. You'll only need to feed it about once a week or so to maintain its strength when not in use (you can just feed it cold and then pop it back in the fridge right afterwards; no need to warm it up first). When you are ready to make dough, feed your starter at room temperature as needed, to wake it back up.

Basic Sourdough Recipe

Ingredients:

- 1 C Warm Water (80 – 95 degrees F)
- $\frac{3}{4}$ C Sourdough Starter
- 2 tbsp Vegetable Oil
- 4 C (20 ounces) of Bread Flour
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp Fine Non-Iodized Salt

Instructions:

- 1) Combine the water, sourdough starter, vegetable oil, bread flour, and salt in a large mixing bowl. Squish the mixture together with your hands until the flour is fully absorbed. The dough will feel dry, rough, and shaggy.
- 2) Cover the bowl with plastic wrap, reusable wax wrap, or a very damp kitchen towel. Let rest or “autolyze” for about 30 minutes to 1 hour. After the dough has rested, return to the bowl and work it into a ball (it doesn’t have look perfect).
- 3) Now the dough is ready to rise. This step is referred to as the “bulk rise” or “bulk fermentation.” To do so: cover the bowl of dough with lightly oiled wrap and let rise at room temperature, about 68-70 F.
- 4) The dough is ready when it has almost doubled in size and no longer looks dense. This can take anywhere from 3 -12 hours depending on your current room temperature, the potency of your sourdough starter and the specifics of your surrounding environment. (Sourdough bread does not contain instant yeast so it will always take longer to rise. Watch the dough and not the clock.
- 5) Optional Step: About 30 minutes into the bulk rise, you have the option to perform a series of “stretch and folds” to strengthen the bread dough. Although it’s not mandatory, this technique will add height and structure to the finished loaf or boule.
- 6) Remove the dough from the bowl and place on a lightly floured surface. Starting at the top, fold the dough over toward the center. Give it a slight turn, and then fold over the next section of dough. Repeat until you have come full circle on the dough.
- 7) Choose a baking pot. (I bake my sourdough bread in a Dutch oven. The baking pot traps in heat and moisture which is *essential* to achieving an attractive boule. Steam plays a key role in how the bread will rise, open or “bloom” while baking.

Using a Dutch oven helps to control the process. (You can use any oven safe pot that can heat up to 450 degrees F.)

- 8) After shaping the dough, it needs to rise again. This is called the “second rise”. To do so: generously coat the bottom of your Dutch oven with cornmeal (or line the bottom with non-stick parchment paper instead). Place the dough inside. The dough will rise for a shorter period than the bulk rise (about 30 minutes to one hour). The dough is ready when it’s puffy and no longer dense. It does not need to double in size.
- 9) Preheat your oven to 450° F/ 232° C during the tail end of the second rise.
- 10) After the second rise and right before the dough goes into the oven, make a slash about two to three inches long down the center of the dough. This allows the steam to escape and for the dough to rise during baking. You can use a serrated knife, paring knife, or razor blade to make the incision.
- 11) Place the lid on top of the pot and reduce the oven temperature to 400 degrees Fahrenheit. Bake on the center rack of the oven for 20 minutes. When 20 minutes have elapsed, remove the lid. Your bread will be pale and shiny.
- 12) Continue to bake the bread (uncovered) for an additional 40 minutes or until deep, golden brown. The internal temperature should read 205 – 210 degrees Fahrenheit indicating that the bread is fully baked.
- 13) Cool on a wire rack for at least one hour before slicing. Be patient! If you cut the bread too soon, the interior texture will be gummy.
- 14) Enjoy!