Sourdough Bread: From Starter to Loaf Webinars

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How warm is a “warm place” for storing your starter?
    a. When storing your starter not for immediate use, you may store in the refrigerator or on the counter at room temperature. However, when preparing your starter to make bread, you generally want to keep it in the range of 70-82°F, but the higher range, the more active your starter will be. I like to hover around 78-80F. Too high, though, and it will consume the sugars/starches too fast causing it to peak and fall too quickly.
2. Is salt necessary for the bread to rise?
    a. Sourdough bread will still rise without salt, however, it will taste bland. Salt has a lot of functions in sourdough breadmaking. Besides flavor, it helps develop the gluten, so you will likely get a better oven spring when baking. It’s also a preservative and it does slightly slow down fermentation, which is good as it allows a more even flavor and prevents yeast from eating up all the sugars, meaning there’s enough sugar left to get a brown crust.
3. Can I use all-purpose flour to make my starter?
    a. Yes, you can use all-purpose flour to make your starter. We simply found better results when we used at least 50% rye and 50% all-purpose or bread flour to make a starter, and then when your starter is ready and active, you can make it all 100% all-purpose. But using 100% all-purpose flour to make your starter can be done.
4. When making the starter, is discarding part of it because of volume or quality?
    a. Both! You'll have too much quantity built, but also it can become too acidic. Discarding part of it will keep your starter healthy and active.
5. What do I do if my starter is getting crusty around the lid?
    a. Transfer to a new jar.
6. Is a stainless-steel bowl considered non-reactive?
    a. Yes, stainless steel is non-reactive.
7. How do I tell if the levain is at its peak?
    a. You will see it double or triple in size, have lots of
8. How do I cover my starter?
    a. Cover the jar loosely. Just the lid; don’t tighten the screw band.

9. Can you use a bread maker to make sourdough?
    a. Neither of us have ever used a bread machine to make sourdough. We recommend checking with the manufacturer of your bread machine for instructions and recipes. There are several recipes online for making sourdough in a bread machine.
10. How do you know your bread is done baking?
    a. Follow the recipe's recommendations for baking, and the bread will be done when the crust is golden brown. The loaf will sound hollow when you tap on it. Neither of us use a food thermometer. If you do, you'll look for a temperature of 210°F. However, your bread will reach that temperature about 10 minutes before it is fully baked because it continues to cook after it's been removed from the oven. Also, recognize that if your dough was under-fermented, the thermometer will show it is done, but the inside will still be gummy.
11. Can you use vital wheat gluten in your bread?
    a. Neither of us have tried using vital wheat gluten in sourdough. According to Bob's Red Mill, "You can add vital wheat gluten to any bread recipe, but it's especially effective when baking with low-protein flours like whole wheat and rye (which have trouble developing enough gluten) or in recipes with a lot of extra ingredients added in like nuts, dried fruit, or seeds. We add a few tablespoons of vital wheat gluten when a recipe recommends using high-protein bread flour but all we have is regular all-purpose flour, as with bagels and some artisan breads."
12. Can you cook sourdough in a loaf pan?
    a. Yes, you'll get a softer crust. You would shape the dough into a batard (oval) and place it in your loaf tin. You'll bake it at a lower temperature (around 400°F for about 40 minutes).

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