

# Sourdough notes 21st September 2011

## What is sourdough?

Sourdough is the name given to bread made without adding yeast to the flour. This method of producing bread relies on yeasts present on the grain. As well as these naturally occurring yeasts, other acidic bacteria build up in the bread dough giving the bread its characteristic sour taste.

## Sourdough or Leaven?

If the starter is made using rye flour it is called sourdough and if wheat flour is used (to create a leaven) it is a white leaven bread. Once the starter is active you can use strong white flour to sustain it which will give a lively ferment but still retain the flavour of the yeasts from the rye or wheat, for a time anyway.

## Sourdough starters

The yeasts on the grain need nurtured in order to multiply enough to bake bread so they need the best conditions we can create.

- ❖ Firstly, no salt, no sugar, no acid. Salt and sugar in high enough concentrations will inhibit yeast growth.
- ❖ Use stoneground flour which hasn't been overheated by steel rollers during milling. Heat will kill the natural yeasts.
- ❖ Use organic flour to avoid any pesticide residue which might hinder yeast growth
- ❖ If the water in your neighbourhood is heavily chlorinated then use spring water to get the starter going.
- ❖ Use clean bowls and utensils - obvious really.

❖

Some bakers add live yoghurt to provide lactic bacteria  
Currants or sultanas can be added as another source of wild yeast but you have to fish them out once activity starts.

## Which flours to use?

Traditionally rye but can be wholemeal and with either you can switch to using white flour to keep the starter going.

## A 5 day schedule to create a starter

Use a clean container big enough to hold 1litre and with a lid (or use cling film). If like me you can lose track of weights when someone comes to the door, it helps to label containers with their weight or note it somewhere.

- ❖ **Day 1** mix 40g rye flour and 60g warm water, cover and leave somewhere warm.

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- ❖ **Day 2** add same again (40/60) - mix in, keep warm/covered
- ❖ **Day 3** add 100g strong white and 100g warm water. By now there should be bubbling activity and interesting smells.
- ❖ **Day 4** add 200g white flour and 200g warm water. You should now have 800g of starter which is enough to provide 500g starter for 1k of flour and still leave around 250g to continue the cycle.
- ❖ **Day 5** Take out enough starter to bake. Around 500g of starter added to 1 kilo of additional flour is about right. If you have built up your starter to around 800g you should have at least 250g left to continue your starter. Add 120g flour and 120g water to this remaining starter to begin preparing for the next batch of bread.

## Why increase the amounts?

If you add the same small amount of flour/water to existing starter each day there will not be enough fresh flour to get all of the yeast active. The lactic bacteria will then predominate which increases the acidity of the starter, ie the sour taste. This is why sourdough instructions bizarrely tell you to throw away two thirds of your starter. This is just to keep acidity in check.

If you are not baking frequently enough to use the growing jar of starter then either resort to throwing away half to two-thirds or store it in the fridge.

## Is it working?

If there is liquid on top then the starter maybe too cold or needs fed

If the starter has deflated sponge look, wrinkly it probably needs flour & water and maybe cooler place.

An awful smell is OK, just stay with it. Wholemeal leavens generally smell sweeter.

If nothing has happened ie no interesting smells and no bubbles after 3 days then you need to try again with a different flour or perhaps some magic sultanas.

## Storing a sourdough starter

Short term - keep it somewhere warm if you are going to bake with it in the next day or two - may need more flour & water

Longer term, put it in the fridge which will slow activity down but the yeast won't die, even after a month or two!

## Reviving a sourdough starter

When you rescue a sourdough starter from the back of the fridge it will probably have separated into liquid on top and sludge at the bottom. Pour off the liquid and stir in 50/50 flour and water equal in weight to the remaining sludge. Keep it warm, covered and refreshed until activity resumes.