



Starting with Sourdough: The stress free way to success

Introduction

The idea of taking on a sourdough starter and making your own bread and other products at home can be overwhelming to the point that you might say, “no way,” right? Here’s our stress free way to using a sourdough starter when you want it and keeping it in good condition when you’re busy. You can make sourdough and have a life, too! ☺

Why Sourdough?

Why do you want to make sourdough? Here are my reasons. What are yours?

- **Taste!** The tangy and mildly sour taste of sourdough is very pleasing to me.
- **Healthy!** The natural fermentation of the grains makes the nutrients more available for your body to use.
- **Digestible!** The natural fermentation of the grains makes them more easily digested by your body. Plus it doesn’t have added yeast!
- **Traditional!** You are keeping an ancient tradition alive by making your own sourdough. Maybe you can share your starter with someone else or teach your kids or grandkids how to bake with sourdough.
- **Economical!** Making your own bread saves you money, especially if you care about good artisan bread. I make on average one loaf per week at a retail value of \$5/ loaf which saves me over \$200 per year, for example. Plus I don’t ever have to purchase store bought yeast.

Definitions

- **Starter:** Flour and water mixed together forming an active combination of wild yeasts and beneficial bacteria used to ferment and leaven dough. This is what you keep going and use over and over again.
- **Discard:** The combination of flour and water leftover after a maintenance feeding of your sourdough starter and reserving an amount to keep on for a starter. You can either throw it away (no!!!) or use it in many delicious recipes! Because, yes it is edible!

- **Feeding:** This is the process where you add more flour and water to your sourdough starter to “feed” the bacteria and yeasts in it to keep it going and happy and healthy.
- **Levain:** While this word may have a more technical definition, think of it as a fed sourdough starter.
- **Active or Bubbly starter:** This is starter that has been fed and is actively bubbling and risen up. This is when your starter is at it’s peak and is usually the best time to use it in a recipe for maximum rising potential.
- **Proof:** This means giving time for the dough to rise.

Feeding Your Sourdough Starter: Doesn’t have to be like little shop of horrors

When I got my first sourdough starter, I didn’t know how to take care of it so I fed it every day to keep it happy and had all of this waste because I wasn’t baking every day. It became a beast of a burden and I just quit. Sound familiar?

This time around I was determined to make it work. I figured out an easy way to use it only when I was ready and to keep it in good condition to keep going and going at the same time. Here goes:

The Easy Once-a-Week Sourdough Starter Maintenance Plan

The basics are I keep a small amount of sourdough starter in the fridge until I want to use it. I aim for a week in the fridge, then I feed it, use it, and save some, to keep it going.

To feed: (ideally using an electric scale in grams, which makes the process easier, but not strictly necessary)

1. **GET CONTAINER:** Get a clean container ready to feed your starter in. I like to use a quart jar personally but you can use a bowl with a lid or a cloth or something else, whatever you have.
2. **TARE CONTAINER:** Tare the empty jar.
3. **WEIGH STARTER:** Scrape your starter that you had stored in the fridge into your container and determine the weight in grams.
4. **FEED:** Add water and flour in the same weight in grams as your sourdough starter is. In other words it is a 1:1:1 ratio by weight of starter : water : flour.
5. **MIX:** Mix all together until well combined. I like to use a small silicone spatula, but any utensil will work.
6. **ACTIVATE:** Let sit at room temperature until risen up, ideally doubled, with bubbles. This can take between a few hours or most of the day depending on temperature.
7. **USE AND SAVE:** Save some out (50-100 grams or a half cup is a good amount) in a small jar. I like to use a half pint or a pint jar with lid. Put the saved portion

back into the fridge for next week. Use whatever is leftover in your recipe. You may find that you have to feed it two times to get enough for a recipe.

There are other ways to maintain a sourdough starter, just so you know. This is just one way that works well for busy farmers to keep sourdough on their tables but not be a slave to it. 😊

Recipes for Making Sourdough Bread and Using Your Starter “Discard”

When someone says sourdough, most people think of sourdough bread. And, why not? It’s so delicious!

But, there are other really great ways to incorporate the health benefits and flavor enhancement of sourdough into your baking and cooking.

Here is our basic bread recipe. And here are a few other recipes for when you’re not really in the mood to bake bread but want to use up your sourdough discard from your once-a-week feeding.

I admit that I actually make more of the “discard” recipes at my house than I do bread! They’re easy and tasty!

Basic Sourdough Bread (Hannah)

- 30 grams sourdough starter
- 120 grams warm water
- 130 grams all purpose flour
- 315 grams warm water
- 400 grams all purpose flour
- 200 grams whole grain flour
- 2 teaspoons salt

1. *Combine sourdough starter, 120 grams warm water, and 130 grams all purpose flour. Cover with plastic wrap and let sit until bubbly, 3+ hours.*
2. *Add 315 grams warm water and salt. Stir to combine. Add 400 grams all purpose flour and 200 grams whole wheat flour. Combine well and let sit covered with plastic wrap for 15 min.*
3. *Dump bowl contents onto floured board. Fold dough in half onto itself a few times. Place bowl upside down on top of dough and let rest for 15 min.*
4. *Repeat above process and let rest another 15 min.*
5. *Repeat above process and put back into bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and proof 4 hours.*
6. *Preheat empty Dutch oven with lid on in 475 degree oven.*
7. *Scrape dough onto floured board and fold it into itself a few times. Transfer dough into proofing basket or use a floured towel inside a bowl. Cover with plastic wrap and proof for 1 hour.*

8. *Remove Dutch oven from oven. Remove lid. Transfer bread into hot Dutch oven. Replace lid. Bake for 30 minutes covered. Remove lid and bake another 15 minutes.*
9. *Remove bread from Dutch oven and set on cooling rack for 1 hour before slicing.*

Sourdough Skillet (Mary Margaret and Hannah)

- 6-10 cups chopped veggies of choice
- 1-1.5 pounds cooked meat or protein of choice (I use ground meat)
- 1.5 cups sourdough starter
- 3 eggs
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 3 T butter
- Herbs or spices as desired
- Grated cheese of choice (I usually use about 6 oz)

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Lay your cooked meat and veggies mixed together evenly in the bottom of a greased oven safe skillet or casserole. Mix together sourdough starter, eggs, salt, butter, baking powder and herbs/spices. Pour over top of veggies/meat mixture. Top with cheese. Bake 25-30 minutes until cooked through.

Sourdough Dutch Baby (Mary Margaret)

- 6 T butter, melted
- 6 large eggs
- 320 grams sourdough starter
- ½ cup milk
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 T maple syrup
- 1 teaspoon vanilla
- 2/3 cup or more berries or other fruit

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Mix all ingredients except fruit in a bowl. Grease a baking dish or large oven safe skillet. Pour batter into dish. Sprinkle fruit all around on top evenly. Bake until set, 15-25 minutes.

Sourdough Drop Biscuits (Mary Margaret)

- 2 cups flour
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 T baking powder
- 2 T sugar (or I use less)
- 1 cup sourdough starter
- 1 ¼ cup heavy cream

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Mix the dry ingredients together in large bowl. Mix the wet ingredients together in smaller bowl. Gently combine wet into dry until just

combined. Scoop out about ¼ cup “balls” onto greased baking sheet leaving about 1 inch around them for expansion. Bake until done, about 15 minutes.

Sourdough Pancakes (Hannah)

- 2 cups fed starter
- 2 eggs
- 4 T melted butter or coconut oil
- 2 T maple syrup
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon baking soda

Mix all ingredients together adding baking soda last. Preheat skillet to medium heat. Add desired cooking fat (I like bacon grease) to pan. Add batter once fat is shimmering in pan. Add any desired filling, such as small slices of apple or blueberries by sprinkling on the pancake after it is ladled onto hot skillet. Once you see numerous bubbles forming on the surface of the pancake, it's time to flip! Flip over and allow to cook another 30 seconds to 1 minute. Repeat for each pancake.

Please keep in mind that there are endless variations of recipes for making sourdough bread and other products. These are our current favorites and I'm sure you'll find yours!

How to Feed Your Starter without Waste: Farmer Gene's tips and “cheat sheet” to approximating weight and volume

Another reason that I use my sourdough starter successfully is because of my husband, Gene. He's a math whiz. So I got him to help me figure out how to feed my starter for the appropriate amount for any recipe I want to make without having a lot to throw out.

Here are his tips and the system that I figured out. I hope it is helpful to you!

Cheat sheet of what you need to know:

- **1 cup of starter made from water and all purpose flour = 240 grams**
- **Always save some starter, 50-100 grams is a good amount to shoot for.**
- **Feed your starter 1 : 1 : 1 starter : flour : water by weight in grams. Approximate weight is okay. Fudging a little is okay, too.**

Steps to making a no-waste sourdough feeding plan:

1. Take your starter out of the fridge and weigh it in grams (see above for how to do this). *(example: say it is 50 grams)*
2. Pick your recipe and approximate in grams the end point of fed starter you want to have. *(example: say I want to make my sourdough skillet recipe x 3, so I'll need 4.5 cups of starter which is approximately 1080 grams)*

3. Figure out at what point during this round's feeding process you want to take some fed starter out to save in your fridge for next time. I always aim for approximately 50 to 100 grams. On the first feeding? Or on the second, subsequent, or final feeding?
*(example: I want to end up with 50-100 grams in my fridge. My options include taking it on the first feeding or the second feeding or even at the end in this case. First feeding option:
 $50 \times 3 = 150$
 $150 - 50 \text{ for starter} = 100$
 $100 \times 3 = 300$
 $300 + 390 + 390 = 1060$ <----- fudging here is okay
Second feeding option:
 $50 \times 3 = 150$
 $150 \times 3 = 450$
 $450 - 90 \text{ for starter} = 360$
 $360 \times 3 = 1080$ <----- The second feeding looks easier for me, so I'll pick that one.)*
4. Go ahead and feed 1:1:1 starter : water : flour by weight according to your plan and save some at the right time and use the rest. Voila, no waste!

Frequently Asked Questions and Troubleshooting

What kind of flour can I use?

You can use any kind of flour, whole grain or white. I usually use a mix and fresh grind the whole grain component of my breads. Wheat, spelt, rye and other gluten-containing grains are traditionally used, but experiment with it! It's always worth a try!

What if I forget to feed my starter for longer than a week?

Say you're sorry and feed it as soon as you remember. It just might forgive you! ☺

Why isn't my starter rising up?

There are a number of reasons that your starter may be not rising up. Either it is very sluggish from neglect, in which case you can just give it more time to see if it will eventually activate or feed it again to see if that will do it. Or it could be because of reasons like using a metal bowl with sourdough (a no-no), using anti-bacterial or other harsh cleaning chemicals that may retard the natural good bacteria in the starter, or using chlorinated city water. Or it may simply need more time because it's cold in the room.

How temperature acts on fermentation: basic overview

As with all fermentations, temperature acts on your fermentation process as a major influence. The warmer the ambient temperature the faster your fermentation goes and the cooler the ambient temperature the slower your fermentation goes. Your starter can bubble and double in practically an hour when it is hot and when it is cold it can take overnight or up to 12 hours to get to the same place.