

Pete's sourdough



Taking care of your sourdough starter

A starter is a natural leaven, with nothing artificial in it at all. Properly looked after, it will last for years, and provide you with many beautiful baked delights.

Step 1

- If you're going to keep your starter at room temperature, you can bake with a bit of it every day. You will need to feed your starter regularly. For details see the end of this recipe.
- If you're going to keep it in the fridge, you can bake with it every so often - but beware that it'll take 2-3 days to adjust back to room temperature and get back up to its full liveliness. It should keep in the fridge for a month or more before it dies.

Step 2. When you want to bake a loaf:

Ingredients

- 250g natural leaven from your starter
- 1.5tsp salt 1.5tsp diastatic malt (optional but it does improve the rise)
- 500g white bread flour or any other strong bread flour
- 300ml water

Method is a complete hotchpotch adapted to my routine/ oven/ temps, and varies lots. It's evolved as mix of many books' and tutors' wisdom, plus multiple errors and very flat, frisbee-like loaves! Essentially it's a 24 hour process, from mixing it after lunch one day to eating it for lunch the next day.

1. Mix anytime between 1 and 7pm. This can be a rough mix to bring everything together, and then leave it to autolyse for 30 minutes
2. Knead (or not) a few times during the afternoon and evening. YouTube will be able to teach you to knead better than a written recipe. You can use the dough hook on a Kitchen Aid or similar electric mixer to do the kneading for you. If you do this I suggest that you knead it twice.
3. Before you go to bed, gently shape it into a round and put it into a floured banneton (using a mix of semolina and flour seems to work well and prevents the dough sticking to the banneton) or proving basket overnight. (This is video to help with shaping dough: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEG1BjWroT0>.) Cover with a plastic bag or cling film to stop it going crusty. Put in the fridge overnight. This is where the sour taste comes from, and the longer you retard this final prove the more sour you're gonna get. You can extend this final prove to as long as 48 hours.

4. In the morning, take the dough out of the fridge and put the oven on as high as it will go, with a cast iron pot inside (I use a Le Creuset circular casserole with the lid on). Let the oven preheat for at least 25 minutes. It needs to be screaming hot to get the dough to rise initially. Try to keep the oven door open for as little time as possible so that the precious heat doesn't escape.

5. Turn your banneton or proving basket upside down and place the dough as gently as you can into the crock pot. Score the top with a sharp knife if you like - you can enjoy experimenting with different patterns as time goes on, e.g. stripes, lattice, square.

6. Bake for 30 mins with the lid on, then 15 mins lid off. You'll know when it's cooked through because you'll get a hollow sound when you tap the bottom of the loaf.

7. Leave to cool on a wire rack... or just slice it up, slather it in butter and eat right away.

Feeding your natural leaven (starter):

- 125ml water
- 25g wholemeal flour
- 100g white bread flour

Once you've used 250g of your starter for a loaf, feed the starter with this and stir it in. You'll get to know when your starter is lively and ready to bake with - it'll be more bubbly and active. For further reading: River Cottage, *Bread*, has a good introductory chapter on bread baking, and also on the difference with natural yeast.

