

simple practical

home cooking

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The Daily Recipe: Sourdough Bread

Prepare the basic sourdough recipe:

3 cups of sourdough starter

4 cups of unbleached white flour (optional time to add some portion of whole wheat flour)

2 cups room temperature water

2 teaspoons salt (if using sea salt, you might want to make those slightly rounded, as sea salt is somewhat less concentrated in saltiness.)

Blend with whisk until dry ingredients are completely moist. Let rest 5 minutes. (This does not have to be exact. I have let it rest for a good hour before.)

After resting period, add about 1/2 cup of flour at a time and mix after each addition until the dough forms a semi-sticky ball. The reason for adding the flour a portion at a time is to keep from adding too much before the kneading stage.

Kneading:

Spread a thin, but complete layer of flour on the counter or kneading surface. Put the sticky ball of dough on top of that, then sprinkle a bit of flour on top of it.

Knead the dough for about 10 minutes, adding just enough flour to keep it from sticking to the counter, until the ball is smooth and springs back quickly to a finger indentation.

Place kneaded dough in a greased bowl, turning it once to have a greased side up to keep it from drying out while rising. Cover with a damp towel.

Loaves - Let rise 3 to 4 hours, until doubled. Meanwhile, grease 2 loaf pans.

Flatbread - Let rise 6-12 hours. (I don't try to eyeball doubling here as much, going more by time, but it will noticeably rise.) Before it is done, grease 2 half-sheet pans.

Loaves - Lightly sprinkle flour on the countertop as needed. Dump the dough out of the bowl and divide the dough in half, trying to only cut where it will be divided (I use a table knife or the narrow edge of a rubber spatula). Tuck and fold the ends and edges of each half into a loaf shape, trying pinch to seal where necessary to keep holes from developing in the loaf. Place the dough in the pre-greased loaf pan.

Flatbread - Follow the same steps for dividing as with loaves, only place each half on one pre-greased half-sheet pan. Then, gently press the dough so that it evenly fills the pan. Score it into the size pieces you want with a sharp knife. I cut it into a 3 by 4 array, which is a good bun and sandwich size.

Loaves - Let rise in pans about 90 minutes, or until center of uncooked loaf is about one inch taller than the sides of the pan. During the last half hour or so of rising, pre-heat oven to 400°F.

Flatbread - Let rise in the half-sheet pans 2 hours, or until approximately doubled. During last half hour of rising, pre-heat oven to 500°F.

Loaves - Bake for about 45 minutes, or until loaves are done. If they are browned and sound hollow when you knock on the top of

them, that is a good sign of being done. Take them out of pans immediately to cool on a cooling rack. The end-crust is really good to eat right away. If you do cut the crust off, you might want to cool the loaf cut-side down on a wooden cutting board.

Flatbread - Bake for 12 - 14 minutes. I find they cook more evenly if I rotate the pans halfway through the baking time. The flatbread cools fine in the pan on a cooling rack, but can also be removed to get a crustier lower crust.

Cool all bread thoroughly before putting in plastic to store on the counter. How long it will keep at room temperature will depend on your climate. Both the loaves and the flatbread pieces store well in the freezer for several weeks in sealed plastic bags or containers.