

Sour Dough Guide

Equipment:

One smaller storage glass jar with lid
One larger feeding glass jar (eg preserves jar)
Kitchen scales (ideally)
Mixing bowl
Bulk fermentation bowl (you can use the mixing bowl).
2 proving baskets or bowls (you can use pyrex bowls or equivalent)
2 baking trays
1 cooling rack

Ingredients:

Wholemeal flour
High grade flour
Salt
Water

Step 1 – Feeding (36 hours prior to planned baking (p2pb)):

- Remove your starter from the fridge and pour out any liquid that has accumulated at the top. Pour the starter from the storage jar into the feeding jar. (I leave the storage jar sitting upside down in the feeding jar for a while as it drains slowly.)
- Add 175g wholemeal flour to the feeding jar. (It's OK if it's not exactly 175g just add the same amount or slightly more of water.)
- Add 175g water to the feeding jar. (I add water to the storage jar and shake it up to get the last of the starter and then pour that into the feeding jar.)
- Stir the contents of the feeding jar with a knife to mix the water and flour completely with the starter. Set aside somewhere at room temperature for 12 hours.
- Clean the storage jar thoroughly (ideally in a dishwasher which should sterilize it).

Step 2 – Bulk fermentation (24 Hours p2pb):

- Make the dough (this will produce two medium sized loaves).
- Put 800g high grade flour into the mixing bowl.
- Add 12 - 14g salt to the mixing bowl.
- IMPORTANT: use a fork to mix the salt into flour. A high concentration of salt on top of the flour can affect the starter.
- Add 460g of water to the mixing bowl.
- Add 320g of starter from the feeding jar into the mixing bowl.
- Use the fork to mix together the ingredients in the mixing bowl until they start to come together then set aside to autolyse briefly while you sort the starter.

If you plan to make more than two loaves this cycle now complete step 1 again adding 175g wholemeal flour and water to the feeding jar and mixing.

If you just want two loaves, decant the remaining starter (should be around 350g) from the feeding jar back into the storage jar. Put the lid on tightly and return the storage jar to the fridge. Clean the mixing jar thoroughly (ideally in a dishwasher again) and set aside.

- Tip the contents of the mixing bowl onto a clean bench.
- With the dough sitting on the bench, clean out the mixing bowl – you’ve basically made flour and water paste so it’s easier to clean immediately than later.
- Place a little bit of oil in the bulk fermentation bowl (best to do it now as your hands will be covered shortly). I use olive oil but in this economy the cheapest will do.
- Knead the dough (slowly at first until it comes together) until it is silky smooth. It is ready when you can get the window pane effect – hold the dough up and stretch it out until it is translucent enough to see light through it. You should be able to do this without the dough tearing.
- Place the dough in the bulk fermentation bowl and rotate it through the oil until it’s covered with a light coating all over (this helps to stop it sticking to the bowl).
- Cover the bulk fermentation bowl with a cold damp tea towel. Then place somewhere cool (but not cold – ideally 10 to 16 degrees) until it has doubled in size. (See Notes below for extra intel.)

Step 3 – Cold proving (12 hours p2pb)

- Coat your proving baskets or bowls with a generous amount of flour (any kind is OK but I generally wouldn’t use wholemeal as it will stick more than white flour).
- Tip the dough from the bulk fermentation bowl onto a clean bench and knead briefly to punch it down and remove some of the air.
- Cut the dough into two even parts.
- Working with one part at a time, use both hands to repeatedly drag the dough towards you across the bench. This will tighten the dough and should form a nice round ball. Once the dough is tight immediately drop it into a proving basket top side down. Repeat this step with the second portion.
- Cover your proving baskets (I stick them into plastic bags) and place in the fridge.

If you are making more loaves now mix up the dough for the next two as per Step 2.

Step 4 – Baking

- Place a heat proof dish (ideally metal) in the bottom of the oven. This will receive hot water to create steam.
- Adjust the racks in the oven to fit two loaves – one near the bottom and the other about half way up.
- Pre-heat the oven to 230 Celcius fan bake. While the oven is warming...
- Boil water in a kettle. You only need to boil the minimum for the kettle.
- Prepare two baking trays with a light dusting of flour (again any kind is OK but I’d use white over wholemeal).
- When the oven is almost up to temperature remove the proving baskets from the fridge and tip the dough out onto one baking tray each.

- Using a sharp knife or razor blade cut the dough to allow it to expand. You can experiment with cutting patterns until you have a preferred one. I use three parallel cuts perpendicular to the longest diameter (the dough is never perfectly round).
- Once the oven is up to temperature, place both trays in the oven and pour the boiled water into the dish at the bottom, closing the oven door promptly afterwards.
- Set a timer and bake for 30 minutes.
- When the loaves are ready, immediately remove from the oven and transfer to a cooling rack. Allow to cool for at least 10 minutes before attempting to slice. The loaves are hard to cut when very warm but will get easier as they get cooler.

Step 5 – Freezing

When the loaves are completely cooled, slice any remaining uneaten loaf. Put the slices into a plastic bag and place in the freezer. The loaf freezes well but stales quickly so the sooner it goes into the freezer the better. When I need some bread I remove the slices I want from the freezer and defrost in the microwave. Or you can use a toaster or a combination of both.

Notes:

On restoring your starter:

How quickly your starter bounces back from storage in the fridge is very much a function of how long it has been stored. If it's just been a week since previous baking the guide above should prove correct (it will be ready to use in about 12 hours). If it has been a couple of weeks it might take up to 24 hours. You can tell when it is ready as it will look bubbly in the feeding jar. Sometimes if it's warm or the starter is very vigorous it can become active quickly, use all the food available and then settle down again – in this case it won't look as bubbly but there should be residue on the jar from where it was higher when at its most bubbly. It's still fine to use – it will be hungry to ferment the flour in your dough.

If the starter has been sitting in the fridge for a month or more, you'll probably see the liquid on the top looks brown and smells like malt vinegar (it probably is a kind of vinegar but I haven't researched it). It can take longer to come back to life after you pour the vinegar off and feed it. In this case you may need to feed it, discard the excess after 12 to 24 hours and then feed it again before it becomes vigorous once more.

In general the rule of thumb is the longer it has been in the fridge the longer it will take to come back to life and the more feedings may be required. If you bake every one or two weeks however you should never need to discard any starter.

On proving times:

How long the loaves take to prove very much depends on the vigour of your starter and the proving temperature. The above guideline with 12 hour intervals works for my starter and the temperature of our garage (where I do the bulk fermentation because it is cooler than the house). If the temperature is warmer or the starter more vigorous the dough can double in around 6 hours – rarely faster than that. So it pays to keep an eye on the dough when you are starting out or the temperature is very different. Ideally find somewhere you can place

the dough week after week that is as consistent in temperature as possible and work out timings that work for you.

Sour dough starter also changes over time as the colony evolves with new yeasts introduced from the flour or environment or changes in the environment (by storing it in the fridge for example you are selecting for yeasts that can handle colder temperatures and bounce back quickly). So you might find that the starter changes over time and you have to modify your proving times accordingly.

Generally the cold prove in the fridge should be consistent and forgiving of significant changes in time. For example, it doesn't seem to make much difference for me whether it spends 8 or 16 hours in the fridge. However, if the bulk fermentation resulted in over-proving (it was warm and it more than doubled in size, for example), I will generally punch the dough down more and do a quicker cold prove as the dough will be more active going into the fridge and it will probably be well over proved after 12 hours.

Expert instructions:

For excellent detailed instructions on every step I highly recommend watching Patrick Ryan's guide to sourdough on youtube:

 [How To Make Sourdough Bread Masterclass](#)