

BASIC SOURDOUGH STARTER GUIDE

WHAT TO DO FIRST

Transfer your flat starter from the small jar into a quart-sized glass jar.

Feed the starter one scant cup of all purpose flour and 1/2 cup of warm water. Cover the jar with a square of fabric held in place with a rubber band, or another breathable lid.

In 5-6 hours, discard all but about 1/3 cup starter. Do not use the discarded starter to bake with yet, just toss it in your compost.

Feed the starter again, one scant cup of all purpose flour and 1/2 cup warm water. Allow to sit overnight or up to 12 hours in a cool room temperature spot, and repeat the process of discarding and feeding the starter once more.

After three feedings, your starter should appear bubbly and light after 5-6 hours of fermentation and is ready to use.

MAINTAINING YOUR STARTER

Your starter will be fed with the same formula each time you feed it:

Discard all but about 1/3 cup of starter (precision is not important for this, just use your best judgement or measure the first few times so you get a sense of what it looks like), add one scant cup flour and one half cup of water, and stir together. Allow to ferment in a quart-sized jar with a fabric or breathable cover on top, in a room temperature place, for 5-6 hours or overnight.

Use your discarded starter to bake with or build a levain for baking bread, or add to your compost or feed to your chickens. You can keep discarded starter active in the refrigerator for a day or two, but as soon as it is flat or develops a thin layer of liquid on top (alcohol from the fermentation process), it is best thrown out.

HOW OFTEN TO FEED YOUR STARTER

If you intend to use starter every day, feed your starter each morning or in the morning and evening.

The frequency with which you will feed your starter depends heavily on the temperature in your kitchen and how often you'd like to bake. In the summertime, you may need to feed your starter more often or store it in the refrigerator to slow fermentation.

Starter can be safely stored in the refrigerator for several days, and rejuvenated following the process described above for about three feedings until it is light and bubbly and sweet-smelling again. This is often a good method for folks who know they will be baking bread on weekends and wouldn't like the work of feeding and discarding starter all week long. Just be sure to take it out a couple of days before you'd like to work with it to give it enough time to awaken and become active again.

A few tips:

Starter likes to maintain the same temperature. Feeding it with ice cold or very hot water can reduce its liveliness.

The wild yeasts in your sourdough starter like a little variety. About once a week, add a tablespoon of rye flour to the starter when you feed it. It will be especially vibrant after this feeding.

It is difficult to neglect your starter to the point of its extinction. Even if you've had to leave it in the back of the refrigerator for a month or more, try to revive it. As long as it does not have any mold growing on it, even a very grey and liquidy starter can often be enlivened and used again.

