

Slow Bread For Busy Lives

Good bread is made with only flour, water, yeast, salt, and lots of time. For most of that time you don't need to be there. Using less yeast means you can leave your dough to prove overnight or while you are at work, and your bread will taste better too.

Using less yeast → longer fermentation = time to do other things + better flavour

Top Tips

- 1. Never store bread in the fridge as cold speeds up the staling process.**
- 2. Make a large batch of loaves and freeze each one in a tightly wrapped plastic bag to save more time.**

Understanding Your Bread Dough

Yeast

Yeast is a living organism that creates CO² as it reproduces, forming bubbles in the dough, which cause it to expand. You need to nurture it like a plant!

Yeast plants need:

- *Food* - they digest the starch in the flour, turning it into sugars. This makes the bread more digestible and gives it more flavour. The longer you prove (or ferment) your dough, the better the flavour will be and the more easily it is digested. Feeding the yeast with sugar speeds up the process but leads to less flavour.
- *Warmth*. The optimum temperature for yeast growth is 28-30°C. The warmer your dough is within this range, the faster it will rise. If you want it to ferment slowly, leave it at room temperature. Bread dough can even be left to rise for a couple of days in the fridge for a real rich flavour.
- *Water* Dried yeast is dormant and needs warmth and water to reactivate. Once the yeast is active you can cool the dough down. You don't need to measure water temperature – it should feel slightly warm when you put your finger in, but not hot. Dissolve the yeast in the warm water for 5 minutes to get it going. It doesn't need to froth.

Flour

- The key element is gluten, a protein that forms long chains when the flour is mixed with water and kneaded. These are essential in making the dough stretchy, so that the bubbles of CO² expand like balloons instead of popping.
- Bread flour has a higher gluten content than plain flour so rises better.
- The more energy you put into the dough during kneading, the stretchier it will be and the higher it can rise. Use the 'windowpane test' to see if your dough is ready. Can you stretch a piece until it's thin enough to see light through? If it breaks before this point, keep kneading.

Salt

- Salt helps the development of gluten, so the right amount is essential to ensure your bread rises well. It also enhances the flavour.
- Too much salt will slow the action of the yeast or even kill it. Never add salt to a sourdough culture and always mix it into the flour before adding the yeast.

Basic Sandwich Loaf Recipe

50:50 Loaf (800g)

265g wholemeal flour
265g white bread flour
3g dried active yeast in 100g warm water
5g salt
270g water

White Loaf (800g)

550g white bread flour
3g dried active yeast in 100g warm water
5g salt
260g water

Wholemeal loaf (800g)

520g wholemeal flour
3g dried active yeast in 100g warm water
5g salt
265g water

(1g water = 1ml water)

Making the dough

1. Pour 100ml of warm water into a small bowl. It should feel warm to the touch but not hot.
2. Sprinkle in the dried yeast granules and stir. Set aside for 5 minutes.
3. Measure your flours and salt into a large bowl and mix.
4. Make a well in the middle and add the dissolved yeast mixture.
5. Add the rest of the water and use your hands to mix the ingredients to a dough.
6. Knead for 10 minutes until the dough is smooth and elastic (Use the windowpane test).
7. Cover the bowl with oiled clingfilm and leave the dough in a cool room to prove until it has doubled in size and you have time to move on to the second stage.

Making the loaves

1. Scrape the dough onto a worksurface and squash down.
2. Form into a loaf shape and place in a greased tin.
3. Leave to rise until doubled in size.
4. Pre-heat the oven to its hottest setting with a small pan of water in the base to produce steam.
5. Bake your loaf for 10 mins before turning the heat down to 190°C. Bake for another 20-25 mins until brown and crusty.
6. Turn loaf onto a cooling rack and tap the bottom. If it sounds hollow it is done. If it sounds dull, put it back for another 5 minutes and test again.
7. Cool fully before eating.

Cleaning up

- Keep dry flour dry and sweep it off the work surfaces. Adding water with a damp cloth turns it into dough, which is harder to remove.
- Don't use hot water. It will cook your dough onto any cloths.
- Soak any dough-encrusted tools in cold water and rub the dough off with your fingers until it dissolves, then rinse before washing.

Sourdough

Sourdough bread is leavened with yeast introduced as a culture developed from the wild yeasts in your flour and the air of your home rather than from commercially produced sources. These yeasts take longer to leaven your bread but produce better flavour and a slight sour tang. This comes from the lactic acid which is a by-product of their growth.

To make your own sourdough culture

Day One

- Mix 25g flour and 50g warm water to a paste in a small container and cover with a lid or plastic film to stop it drying out. (The water should feel warm but not hot to your finger)
- Keep the container in a place as near to 30°C. as you can manage e.g. in an airing cupboard or plant propagator, above an Aga or radiator. A thermometer to check the actual temperature is a good idea at this point. You could also use the type of electric mats used to heat vivariums and sit the tub on top, insulated with a tea towel.

Day Two

- Add 25g flour and 50g warm water
- Stir, cover and return to its warm place.

Day Three

- It may, by now show signs of frothing
- Add 25g flour and 50g warm water
- Stir, cover and return to its warm place. (If there is a greyish liquid on top, it's normal. Stir it in.) It may have started smelling slightly acidic.

Day Four

- Add 25g flour and 50g warm water
- Stir, cover and return to its warm place.

Day Five

You should have 300g of a culture that has bubbled up, collapsed back down and smells and tastes acidic and fruity. This is your starter and you can now use it in the following recipe. Before using it, make sure that it has bubbled up vigorously and collapsed within the last 24 hours. If not, feed it again and leave until it froths.

Culture Storage

- If you intend to use your starter culture in the next few days, keep feeding and watering daily as before and keep it in a warm place. Give any excess to your friends!
- If you won't need it for several days you can keep it in an airtight container at the back of the fridge for months without feeding. When yeasts don't have food or warmth they form spores, and become dormant. SOURDOUGH HOTELS ARE NOT NECESSARY.
- To revive a dormant sourdough culture, stir in some new flour and warm water and place it in a warm (not hot) place. Feed and water it daily until it is bubbling vigorously again. A larger volume of starter needs more flour for food so, as a general rule of thumb, don't store more than the 300g this recipe made originally and add just 25g flour and 50g water each day to keep the same thick cream consistency.

White Sourdough Recipe (800g)

Day One *In the morning (best started when you will be at home the following day)*

Make a levain (the first, runny stage of the dough which builds up the quantity of yeast needed.)

- Use a bowl with room for the mixture to expand.
- Mix together:
 - 78g bubbling starter
 - 88g white bread flour
 - 62g water
- Cover to keep moist and place in a warm place for the day.
- By evening it should be thick and very bubbly.

Day One In the evening

Make up the final dough

- Combine together:
 - 228g levain (from above)
 - 471g white bread flour
 - 8g salt
- Knead for 10 minutes until smooth and elastic.
- Place in a large bowl with room for expansion, cover with oiled cling film and leave to rise at room temperature overnight.

Day Two in the morning

- Scrape your dough onto a worktop and squash it down.
- Line a small bowl with a tea-towel and cover it liberally with flour, or sprinkle the inside of a banneton (proving basket) with flour.
- Form your dough into a loaf and place it in the bowl or basket.
- Alternatively, place it directly into a greased bread tin.
- Cover with oiled clingfilm, or a floured cloth, and leave to rise for several hours until it has doubled in size. The time this takes varies according to the temperature of your room and how vigorous your starter and levain were.

Day Two in the afternoon

- Once your loaf has doubled in size, pre-heat your oven as hot as it gets, with a small dish of water in the base for steam.
- Turn your loaf out gently onto a baking tray.
- Slash across the top with a very sharp knife to allow expansion as it rises in the oven.
- Bake for 30-35 mins until dark brown.
- Turn onto a cooling rack and tap to check it is thoroughly cooked. It should sound hollow. If not, bake for another 5 minutes and test again.
- Listen to the crackle as the crust cools, contracts and splits and enjoy the smell!
- Eat once cool.

For information on why real bread is such a good thing to make for yourself read:

Andrew Whitley, *Bread Matters: The State of Modern Bread and a Definitive Guide to Baking Your Own*, Fourth Estate, London ISBN -13 0-00-978-720374-1

For easy to follow and interesting bread recipes try:

Emmanuel Hadjiandreou, *How to Make Bread*, Ryland Peters and Small, ISBN 978 1 84975 140 7

Jane Mason, *All You Knead is Bread*, Ryland Peters and Small, ISBN 978-1-84975-257-2