

Pain au Levain

Ingredients

Levain

- 1 1/4 cups (149g) All-Purpose Flour
- 1/3 cup (74g) room-temperature (70°F) water
- 1/8 cup (28g) ripe (fed) sourdough starter

Dough

- 2 cups + 2 tablespoons (482g) water, 75°F to 80°F
- 5 1/4 cups (631g) All-Purpose Flour
- 1/2 cup (50g) Dark Rye or Pumpernickel Flour
- 1 tablespoon salt

Directions

Levain

- Knead together the levain ingredients to make a smooth, stiff dough. Place in a lightly oiled bowl, cover, and let ferment overnight (~12 hours) at room temperature (65°F to 75°F). It should have doubled in size and be domed on top, or just beginning to sink in the middle.

Dough

- Tear the levain into small pieces and add it to the dough water. Add the remaining ingredients and mix (2 minutes at lowest mixer speed) until there are no remaining dry pockets of flour.
- Cover the bowl and allow the dough to rest for 30 minutes.
- Knead for 1 1/2 minutes on speed 2 (3 minutes by hand). The dough will be quite sticky.
- Allow the dough to rise for 1 hour in an oiled and covered bowl.
- Fold dough and return it to the bowl to rise for another hour.
- Gently deflate the dough, divide it in half, and shape into two rounds. Place the rounds seam side up on a floured surface, covered well, and let sit 20 minutes.
- Place loaves, seam side up, in floured brotforms (oval or round), cover with greased plastic wrap, and let rise for about 2 hours. Alternatively, refrigerate the loaves after shaping for up to 16 hours before baking.

Baking

- Preheat oven to 450°F for 1 hour with baking sheet or stone on middle rack & cast iron pan on bottom, or Dutch oven/cloche (without cast iron pan).
- Remove loaves from brotforms, without deflating, and place on baking parchment. Score with one long angled cut down the center of the loaf, and spray or brush with water.
- Slide the parchment and loaf onto the hot baking sheet or stone. Pour 1 1/2 cups boiling water into the cast iron skillet. Be sure to wear good oven mitts to prevent a steam burn.
 - If baking in a Dutch oven or cloche, remove the lid after 20 minutes and allow the loaf to finish baking in a dry oven.
- Bake for 35 to 40 minutes. The loaves should be a rich brown, firm on the sides, and sound hollow when tapped on the bottom. Their internal temperature should be 195°F.
- Remove from the oven and cool on a rack.