

CALIFORNIA SOUR DOUGH WHOLE WHEAT BREAD

[TWO LOAVES]

The development of this unusual loaf of sour dough bread was one of my first baking achievements. In the 60's I went professional when California's *Sunset* magazine, at home in the Bay Area where devotees of sour dough French bread are legion (and vocal), bought and published the recipe.

During the three days when the sponge is fermenting in the bowl, a whiff under the plastic wrap will be strongly alcoholic. I use a cup of wheat grains, whole or cracked, in the sponge to give the bread the texture of a provincial loaf. The bread makes exceptionally good toast.

INGREDIENTS	<p>Sponge: 2 cups warm water (105°–115°) 2 packages dry yeast 1/3 cup non-fat dry milk 3 cups whole wheat flour 1 cup whole or cracked wheat grains (optional)</p> <p>Dough: All of the sponge 1/4 cup dark molasses 1 tablespoon salt 3 tablespoons vegetable shortening 2 1/2 to 3 cups all-purpose flour, approximately</p>
BAKING PANS	<p>Two medium loaf pans (8 1/2 x 4 1/2), greased or Teflon, glass or metal. If glass, reduce baking temperature 25°.</p>
PREPARATION	<p>Begin the sponge 3 days before bake day by blending, in a large bowl, the warm water, yeast, milk, whole wheat flour and the wheat grains. Stir well. Cover the bowl tightly with plastic wrap so moisture will not evaporate. Put in a warm place—80° to 85°. Once each day stir the mixture briefly and replace the plastic wrap.</p>
Sponge 3 days Bake Day Dough 15 mins.	<p>Remove the plastic wrap and lay aside. Stir in the molasses, salt and shortening. Stir in the all-purpose flour, a half cup at a time, first with the spoon and then by hand. The dough will be heavy and moist but when it cleans the sides of the bowl it is ready for kneading.</p>
KNEADING 8 mins.	<p>Turn the dough onto a floured work surface, counter top or bread board, and knead with the rhythmic 1-2-3 motion of push-turn-fold. It is a heavier dough than an all-white but presently the gluten will begin to form and the dough will become soft and pliable. Continue kneading. (The dough hook does not work well in this dough.) Add small portion of flour (a teaspoon or so) to control the stickiness, if necessary.</p>
FIRST RISING 2 hours	<p>Place the dough back in the mixing bowl and pat with buttered or greased fingers to keep the surface from crusting. Cover the bowl again with the piece of plastic wrap and move to a warm place (80°–85°) until the dough has risen to about twice its original size (judge</p>

how high it creeps up the sides of the bowl). Because this is leavened with only the 3-day-old sponge, it will not rise as fast as if it had been made with a fresh charge of yeast.

SHAPING
15 mins.

Punch down dough. Knead for 30 seconds to press out the bubbles. With a sharp knife divide the dough into two pieces. Shape into balls, and let rest under a towel for 5 minutes. Shape by pressing each ball—under the palms or with a rolling pin—into a flat oval, roughly the length of the baking pan. Fold the oval in half, pinch the seam tightly to seal, tuck under the ends, and place in the pan, seam down. Repeat with the second loaf.

SECOND RISING
1¼ hours

Place the pans in the warm place, cover with wax paper and leave until the center of the dough has risen even with the edge of the pan.

BAKING
375°
40-50 mins.

Preheat the oven to 375°. With a sharp razor, slash each down the center just before placing the loaves in the oven. This allows the bread to expand without raising up the crust as well as to give this loaf an identification of its own. Bake in the oven until they are deep brown and crusty. Turn one loaf out of its pan and tap the bottom crust with a forefinger. A hard hollow sound means the bread is baked. If not, return to the oven—without the pan—for an additional 10 minutes. If the tops of the loaves appear to be browning too quickly, cover with a piece of foil or brown paper sack. Midway in the bake period shift the pans to different parts of the oven or simply exchange positions.

FINAL STEP

Remove bread from the oven. Turn the loaves onto a metal rack to cool before serving. This bread will keep for at least two weeks, tightly wrapped, and can be frozen for 6 months or more. Toasting brings out the special flavor and aroma of this delicious bread.