

Sourdough Bread

Ingredients

recipe *For the Leaven*

18 g *Active sourdough starter*

75 g *Bread flour* 🛒

75 g *Spring or bottled water, NOT Tap water*

recipe *For the Dough*

525 g *Spring or bottled water, divided*

700 g *Bread flour* 🛒

17 g *Kosher salt* 🛒

Timing

Prep time 24-48 hours Cooking time 45-50 minutes

Yield

Two loaves of bread

1 Make sure your sourdough culture is active

If your sourdough starter has been in the refrigerator, take it out 2 to 3 days before you plan to bake. Feed it daily to make sure it's strong and very active before you make the bread.

2 Make the leaven and let it sit overnight

The night before you plan to make the dough, place all the leaven ingredients in a large bowl and mix thoroughly to form a thick batter. Cover and let stand at room temperature overnight, about 12 hours. It should look all foamy and bubbly.

3 Test to know if the leaven is ready

Generally, if the surface of the leaven is very bubbly, it's ready to be used. To double-check, drop a small spoonful of the leaven in a cup of water; if the leaven floats, it's ready.

4 Dissolve the salt

Place 50 grams of the water and the salt for the dough in a small bowl. Set aside, stirring occasionally to make sure the salt dissolves.

5 Mix the leaven and water

Add the remaining 475 grams of water, for the dough to the bowl of leaven. Stir with a spatula or use your hands to break up and dissolve the leaven into the water. It's OK if the leaven doesn't fully dissolve and a few clumps remain.

6 Add the flour

Add the flour and stir with a rubber spatula until there are no more bits of dry flour and it forms a very shaggy dough.

18 g *Active sourdough starter*

75 g *Bread flour* 🛒

75 g *Spring or bottled water*

50 g *Spring or bottled water*

17 g *Kosher salt* 🛒

700 g *Bread flour* 🛒

7 Autolyze, (Rest the dough 30 minutes or up to 4 hours)

Cover the bowl with plastic wrap or a clean kitchen towel. Let the dough rest for at least 30 minutes or up to 4 hours. This is the autolyze stage where the flour is fully absorbing the water and enzymes in the flour begin breaking down the starches and proteins.

8 Mix in salt/water from above.

Pour the dissolved salt over the dough. Work the liquid and salt into the dough by pinching and squeezing the dough. The dough will feel quite wet and loose at this point.

9 Begin folding the dough (2 1/2 hours)

To fold the dough, grab the dough at one side, lift it up, and fold it over on top of itself. Fold the dough four times, moving clockwise from the top of the bowl (or giving the bowl a quarter turn in between folds). Let the dough rest 30 minutes, then repeat. Do this a total of 6 times, every half hour, for a total of 2 1/2 hours. The dough will start out shaggy and very loose, but will gradually smooth out and become tighter as you continue folding.

10 Let the dough rise undisturbed (30 to 60 minutes)

Once you've finished the folds, cover and let the dough rise undisturbed for 30 to 60 minutes until it looks slightly puffed. This dough won't double in size the way regular, non-sourdough breads will; it should just look larger than it did when you started.

11 Divide the dough

Sprinkle some flour on a work surface and turn the dough out on top. Work gently to avoid deflating the dough. Use a pastry scraper to divide the dough in half.

12 Shape the dough into loose rounds

Sprinkle a little flour over each piece of dough. Use your pastry scraper to shape each one into loose rounds — this isn't the final shaping, just a preliminary shaping to prep the dough for further shaping. Shape them into rounds by slipping your pastry scraper under the edge of the dough and then scraping it around curve of the dough, like turning left when driving. Do this a few times to build the surface tension in the dough (it makes more sense to do it than to read about it!). Flour your pastry scraper as needed to keep it from sticking to the dough.

13 Rest the dough

Once both pieces of dough are shaped, let them rest for 20 to 30 minutes to relax the gluten again before final shaping.

14 Prepare 2 bannetons (or other proofing bowls)

Line 2 bannetons with flour. (Or you can use colanders, or clean mixing bowls lined with clean kitchen towels, dust them heavily with flour, rubbing the flour into the cloth on the bottom and up the sides with your fingers. Use more flour than you think you'll need — it should form a thin layer over the surface of the towel.) I like to use a combination of rice and wheat flour for this, but wheat flour will work just fine.

15 Shape the loaves

Dust the top of one of the balls of dough with flour. Flip it over with a pastry scraper so that the floured side is against the board and the un-floured, sticky surface is up. Shape the loaf much like you folded the dough earlier: Grab the lip of the dough at the bottom, pull it gently up, then fold it over onto the center of the dough. Repeat with the right and left side of the dough. Repeat with the top of the dough, but once you fold it downward, use your thumb to grab the bottom lip again and gently roll the dough right-side up. If it's not quite round or doesn't seem taut to you, cup your palms around the dough and rotate it against the counter to shape it up. Repeat with the second ball of dough.

16 Transfer to the proofing baskets (bannetons)

Dust the tops and sides of the shaped loaves generously with flour. Place them into the proofing baskets upside down, so the seams from shaping are on top.

17 Let the dough rise

Cover the baskets loosely with plastic wrap, or place them inside clean plastic bags. Place the covered basket in the refrigerator and let them rise slowly overnight 12 to 15 hours. If rising overnight, bake the loaves straight from the fridge; no need to warm before baking. Alternatively, let them rise at room temperature until they look billowy and poofy, 3 to 4 hours.

18

Heat the oven to 500°F (or as high as your oven can go (*480 °F for the Breville Smart Oven Air))

Place two Dutch ovens or other heavy-bottomed pots with lids in the oven, and heat to 500°F. (For the Breville Smart Oven Air heat oven to the maximum, 480 °F. Then bake one loaf after the next.)

19 Transfer the loaves to the Dutch ovens

Carefully remove one of the heated Dutch ovens from the oven and remove the lid. Tip the loaf into the pot so the seam-side is down. Repeat with the second loaf. (See Recipe Note above if your loaf sticks to the basket.)

20 Score the top of the loaf

Use a lame, sharp knife, or serrated knife to quickly score the surface of the loaves. Try to score at a slight angle, so you're cutting almost parallel to the surface of the loaf; this gives the loaves the distinctive "shelf" along the scoreline.

21 Bake the loaves for 20 minutes

Cover and bake for 20 minutes at 500°F (480°F in the Breville Smart Oven Air)

22

Reduce the oven temperature to 450°F and bake another 10 minutes (375°F in the Breville Smart Oven Air)

Resist the temptation to check the loaves at this point; just reduce the oven temperature to 450°F. Bake another 10 minutes.

23 Remove the lids and continue baking 15 to 25 minutes

Uncover the pots to release any remaining steam. At this point, the loaves should have "sprung" up, have a dry surface, and be just beginning to show golden color.

24 Bake another 15 to 25 minutes

Continue baking uncovered until the crust is deeply browned; aim for just short of burnt. It might feel a bit unnatural to bake loaves this fully, but this is where a lot of the flavor and texture of the crust comes in.

25 Cool the loaves completely

When done, lift the loaves out of the pots using a spatula. Transfer them to wire racks to cool completely. Wait until they have cooled to room temperature before slicing. If you listen, you might even hear it crackling as it cools.

26 Enjoy