

Gateway Bread

by J Cannon Alder

Quantity: 1

Permanent Link:

Levain

65g Distilled Water (18.1%)
32g Fresh Starter (100% hydration) (8.9%)
45g Bread Flour (12.5%)
20g Whole Wheat Flour (5.6%)

Dough (Autolyze)

215g Bread Flour (59.7%)
100g Yeccoro Rojo White Wheat (or sub white bread flour) (27.8%)
45g Whole Wheat Flour (12.5%)
260g Water (72.2%)
9g Salt (2.5%)

Totals

Dough weight:	791g
Pre-fermented flour:	81g (18.4%)
Flour:	441g (16g from starter)
Fluid:	341g (16g from starter)
Inoculation:	45%
Salt:	9g (2%)
Dough hydration:	77.3%

Notes

Baker's note:

I first encountered this beautiful recipe while on vacation in St. Louis, Missouri at **Union Loafers**. There, I was introduced to what I still hail as the best loaves of bread I have ever had in my entire life. Without question, Loafer's *pain au levain* is the lightest, airiest crumb I have tasted. Phenomenal crust, delicious taste. I'm still speechless about it. It is my personal holy grail of breads and I pay homage to UL with this loaf each time I bake (it's a modification of a formula they shared with me). I highly recommend a visit if you are so lucky to find yourself in STL [link:https://union-loafers-cafe-and-bread-bakery.square.site](https://union-loafers-cafe-and-bread-bakery.square.site)

Organization

This formula works in three main parts:

Pre-bake

0. Starter maintenance
1. Pre-ferment and autolyze ("auto-lees")
2. Bulk fermentation
3. Shaping and cold proof

Bake

4. Score and bake
5. Cool and cut
6. Storage

Believe!

7. A word of encouragement

Steps

0. Starter Maintenance

Anywhere between 12 and 20 hours prior to the bulk fermentation steps, you will prepare the levain. Since I refrigerate my starter between weekly bakes, I need to refresh my starter prior to making a levain. To do this, I empty all the starter into a clean container and add back 30g of the old starter to my original crock. Then, I add an equal ratio of 2:1 flour and water, so 60g of each to refresh the 30g of starter. Also note, I typically mix a 1:1 white/whole wheat blend, so 30g white/30g whole wheat to maintain my starter. The total starter weight after this is ~150g, and I have about ~120g of discard. I like to lightly fry ~80g in a cast iron with some seasoning as a snack, and keep ~40g in a container for sourdough waffles. Also worth noting, I sometimes refresh my starter twice between Friday night and Saturday mid-day so it's really active before making the levain.

1a. Prepare the levain

Three days before baking (i.e., if baking Monday morning, start these steps on Friday night). In a clean container, add the distilled water and starter. Distilled water is best, but not necessary. You can distill your own tap water by filling a wide pan with water and then leaving it uncovered over night. The refreshed starter should float in the water. If the starter does not, consult step 0 (refresh it) or if you already refreshed it, put the starter somewhere warm and check back in half an hour or so. Break up the starter with your fingers, then add the flours and mix until no dry bits remain. Cover and set aside for 10-12 hours. For me, this is overnight.

1b. Autolyze the dough

After preparing the levain, prepare the autolyze in large enough bowl for the dough to double in size. Weigh the flours, then use a fork or dough whisk to mix until consistent. Add water and mix until no dry bits remain, but do not over mix. The dough will feel sticky, but should come together so it's sticking more to itself than to you. Cover and set aside for 10-12 hours, or overnight.

2a. Combine autolyze and levain

In the morning, I test the levain—how does it smell? Sweet? I don't let it get too vinegary, or this will sour the whole loaf. Pinch off a small bit of levain and plop it in some water. If it floats, she's a witch! Pour it over the autolyze, and then use your fingers to dimple the levain down into the autolyze. Let it rest for a few minutes, then stretch and pinch the dough in 5-7 small pinches to complete cover the levain. Be gentle, but not timid. At this point, sprinkle the salt over the dough.

2b. Folds and bulk rise

Now begins the bulk rise. About 30 minutes after combining the levain and autolyze, you'll complete 3-4 sets of [stretch-and-fold](#) to develop a glutinous structure for to the bread, each spaced out ~30-35 minutes. The first 1-2 stretches will be more vigorous than the latter 1-2 stretches because you want to preserve the gasses that will develop during this phase. After completing the last stretch-and-fold, let the dough continue to develop, usually 2-3 hours. You will need to adjust the bulk rise times based on the ambient temperature during the bulk rise. If it's cold, you can cover the dough and keep it in the oven with a pot of warm water. If it's warmer, try to keep the dough in a slightly cooler spot. You're generally targeting ~72-75F, but if it's an 80F day, that's fine, just cut back the times.

3a. Pre-shape

During the bulk rise, the dough should roughly double in size. If it does not, no problem, but you want to make sure it has some life to it. Wet your fingers and poke the dough; if it bounces back most of the way, you're probably ready to shape, regardless of whether it doubled in size. I don't know why this is the case.

Lightly flour a surface and then gently turn out the dough. Use a bench knife to make a round; you don't need to do any stretches at this stage. Maurizio at the Perfect Loaf really is a master, so check out this video for a great tutorial: [How to preshape bread dough](#). After the initial shaping, cover the dough with a light towel and let rest for 30 minutes or so.

3b. Final shaping

Lightly flour the dough, just enough to cover what will become the outer crust. If making a boule (round), gently flip the dough floured side down and stretch two flaps. Fold the flaps in thirds, making an 'envelope', then repeat with the two unfolded sides. [Shaping a boule](#)

3c. Cold proof

I prefer a cold proof because it enables me to make lovely designs not otherwise possible if I were to bake the same day (called "Ambient bake"). Either way, use rice flour to coat a banneton (or use a tea towel with an appropriately sized bowl) and flip the shaped boule in, seam-side up. Seam-side up means what was touching the table is now on top. You can cold proof in the refrigerator for 12-36 hours, though I generally go on the shorter side (14 hours, i.e. next morning).

4a. Preheat the oven... then score

When you are ready to bake, put baking vessel in a cold oven and crank that baby up to 500F (or 550F if you've got it!). I heat for 45 minutes to one hour, just make sure the oven's hot-hot-hot!

A few minutes before putting the loaf in the oven, pull it out of the fridge and score it. You can find some truly lovely designs online—my favorite is leaves/wheat because they're so easy and look so pretty. I flip the loaf onto a piece of parchment paper and dust off the rice flour, then reapply white flour to make the designs pop.

4b. Initial bake

Bake the loaf, covered, for 18 minutes at 450-475F.

4c. Topless bake

Remove the cover and continue to bake for another 23-25 minutes at 450-425F. Each time you open the oven, you'll lose heat; adjust the temperature down so the oven isn't "seeking" the set point (but if it is, no big deal. Just don't worry about getting back up to 500F). If you have an oven thermometer, you're aiming for 208F internal temp. Otherwise, just bake until the crust is nice and dark.

5. Cool first, then cut

Yay! You did it. I like to let the bread cool in the oven with the door ajar for 25-30 minutes. If you're doing a second bake, disregard this. If you don't have that time, also disregard. You can just let the bread cool on a rack for at least 2 hours, but preferably 4 hours before slicing into it.

6. Storage

If you're not going to eat the whole loaf in one sitting, cut what you think you'll eat plus one slice (if you did it right, you'll definitely want that one extra slice). You can cover the remaining loaf in a tea towel or in a paper bag. Do NOT put it in a plastic bag or in the refrigerator. If it's going to be a few days, put that bad boy in the freezer. The bread will dry out in the fridge, whereas it's way easier to heat up a frozen loaf in the oven again. Just let the loaf thaw (~2hrs) and then crank up the oven to 400F. Quickly douse it under some water and then bake it for 10 minutes. This will make your crust lively again!

7. A word of encouragement

This looks like a long process... and it is. But you can do it! And once you do it, you'll be able to do it again! And again... Share your progress with others along the way. It's a blast.

The way I've divided it up is that I refresh my starter on Friday night or Saturday morning (sometimes I refresh the starter twice so it's really quite active before making the levain), then step 1 on Saturday night, steps 2 and 3 on Sunday, and steps 4-6 on Monday. It's a ritual and a delightful process I thoroughly enjoy.

I definitely think it is worth it, and hope you do too. Let me know what you think, and please send me any modifications or improvements you make. I'd love to know. Of course, send me a pic of your loaf and the crumb once you've baked it! I'd love to see it. Thanks! -Jacob