



Sourdough Starter

Whether it conjures up a crusty, flavorful loaf of bread or a bubbling crock of flour/water starter, sourdough is a treasured part of many bakers' kitchens. But where does the path to sourdough bread begin? Right in your own kitchen, with your own homemade sourdough starter.

Sourdough baking is as much art as science. The method you'll read here for making sourdough starter isn't an exact match for the one you read on another site, or in a cookbook, or in your great-grandma's diary. But it's the tried-and-true method we use for making starter here at King Arthur Flour, and we feel you'll have success with it.

To begin your starter

- 1 cup whole rye (pumpernickel) or whole wheat flour
- 1/2 cup cool non-chlorinated water

To feed your starter

- a scant 1 cup King Arthur Unbleached All-Purpose Flour
- 1/2 cup cool water (if your house is warm), or lukewarm water (if your house is cool)

Directions

1. **Day 1:** Combine the pumpernickel or whole wheat flour with the cool water in a non-reactive container. Glass, crockery, stainless steel, or food-grade plastic all work fine for this.
2. Stir everything together thoroughly; make sure there's no dry flour anywhere. Cover the container loosely and let the mixture sit at warm room temperature (about 70°F) for 24 hours. See "tips," below, for advice about growing starters in a cold house.
3. **Day 2:** You may see no activity at all in the first 24 hours, or you may see a bit of growth or bubbling. Either way, discard half the starter (4 ounces, about 1/2 cup), and add to the remainder a scant 1 cup King Arthur Unbleached All-Purpose Flour, and 1/2 cup cool water (if your house is warm); or lukewarm water (if it's cold).
4. Mix well, cover, and let the mixture rest at room temperature for 24 hours.
5. **Day 3:** By the third day, you'll likely see some activity — bubbling; a fresh, fruity aroma, and some evidence of expansion. It's now time to begin two feedings daily, as evenly spaced as your schedule allows. For each feeding, weigh out 4 ounces starter; this will be a generous 1/2 cup, once it's thoroughly stirred down. Discard any remaining starter.
6. Add a scant 1 cup (4 ounces) King Arthur Unbleached All-Purpose Flour, and 1/2 cup water to the 4 ounces starter. Mix the starter, flour, and water, cover, and let the mixture rest at room temperature for approximately 12 hours before repeating.
7. **Day 4:** Weigh out 4 ounces starter, and discard any remaining starter. Repeat step #6.
8. **Day 5:** Weigh out 4 ounces starter, and discard any remaining starter. Repeat step #6. By the end of day #5, the starter should have at least doubled in volume. You'll see lots of bubbles; there may be some little "rivulets" on the surface, full of finer bubbles. Also, the starter should have a tangy aroma — pleasingly acidic, but not overpowering. If your starter hasn't risen much and isn't showing lots of bubbles, repeat discarding and feeding every 12 hours on day 6, and day 7, if necessary — as long as it takes to create a vigorous (risen, bubbly) starter. *Note: see "tips," below.*
9. Once the starter is ready, give it one last feeding. Discard all but 4 ounces (a generous 1/2 cup). Feed as usual. Let the starter rest at room temperature for 6 to 8 hours; it should be active, with bubbles breaking the surface. *Hate discarding so much starter? See "tips," below.*
10. Remove however much starter you need for your recipe (no more than 8 ounces, about 1 cup); and transfer the remaining 4 ounces of starter to its permanent home: a crock, jar, or whatever you'd like to store it in long-term. Feed this reserved starter with 1 cup of flour and 1/2 cup water, and let it rest at room temperature for several hours, to get going, before refrigerating it.
11. Store this starter in the refrigerator, and feed it regularly; we recommend feeding it with a scant 1 cup flour and 1/2 cup water once a week.

Tips from our bakers

- One of our readers offers the following thoughts about the duration of everyday feeding, which we think is great advice: "Conditions vary so widely that 7 days can be far too little. I've learned the key is to watch for a dramatic and consistent rise in the jar — at least doubling between 1 and 4 hours after feeding. This could be 7 days or less after you begin, or it could be three weeks (for me it was 12 to 14 days). I would encourage you to consider tweaking your wording a bit to guide bakers to watch for this phenomenon, rather than watch the calendar." Thanks, Ken!
- Why do you need to discard half the starter? It seems so wasteful. Well, it's necessary for three reasons. First, unless you discard, eventually you'll end up with The Sourdough That Ate Milwaukee — too much starter. Second, keeping



AT A GLANCE

PREP	50 mins.
BAKE	
TOTAL	5 days 50 mins.
YIELD	sufficient sourdough for ongoing baking
🕒	OVERNIGHT

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the starter volume the same helps balance the pH. And third, keeping the volume down offers the yeast more food to eat each time you feed it; it's not fighting with quite so many other little yeast cells to get enough to eat. Also, you don't have to discard it if you don't want to; you can give it to a friend, or use it to bake. There are quite a few recipes on our site using "discard" starter, including sourdough pizza crust, sourdough pretzels, and my all-time favorite waffles.

- Why does this starter begin with whole-grain flour? Because the wild yeast that gives sourdough starter its life is more likely to be found in the flora- and fauna-rich environment of a whole-grain flour than in all-purpose flour.
- A note about room temperature: the colder the environment, the more slowly your starter will grow. If the normal temperature in your home is below 68°F, we suggest finding a smaller, warmer spot to develop your starter. For instance, try setting the starter atop your water heater, refrigerator, or another appliance that might generate ambient heat. Your turned-off oven — with the light turned on — is also a good choice.
- Want to put your starter on hold for the summer, or as you go on vacation? Here's how: [Drying your sourdough starter](#).