

Berkeley Sourdough Detailed Instructions

Overview:

I created these instructions to compliment the [Berkeley Recipe](#). I set out to learn more about making sourdough and have learned a few things along the way. First of all there are tens if not hundreds of ways to make sourdough. Some use commercially available yeast, some use yeast and even baking soda. All of the recipes I've tried produced good results but weren't sour enough for me, they lacked that tangy zing that says "Hey I'm sourdough". Then I ran across the Berkeley sourdough recipe. (*See link above.*) I saw an episode some time back of *How it's Made* or some other show similar to that one and they had a spotlight on Boudin Bakery in San Francisco. There they touched on their manufacturing process and history of the company. They have been using the same starter for 150 years! So once you start on this path of making sourdough it's safe to say that your starter could outlive you.

I was reluctant at first to try this recipe because of the steps necessary to make the starter but I saw it was the only way to get the results I was looking for. True sourdough is one that does not use any yeast or baking soda. In fact the only ingredients are flour, water, and salt. What? That's right, only those ingredients are required to make sourdough. If a recipe uses yeast or baking soda I call them hybrids, nothing wrong with them in fact I use a couple for a quick fix. As you make your starter and let it set for days it is gathering up naturally occurring yeast spores. Now these spores feed on the sugars in the flour and grow. That's not the only thing growing, there is also bacteria growing. Sounds bad doesn't it? Well it's not as bad as it sounds; you see the bacteria are what give the sourdough its sour taste. When you use commercial yeast you are overpowering the bacteria and cannot get a strong sour taste. The reason is the commercial yeast and the naturally occurring bacteria consume the same sugars in the flour. On the other hand the naturally occurring yeast spores consume a different sugar in the flour. As you can see there is a balancing act going on here. The longer you leave the dough out the more the bacteria have a chance to grow thus the stronger the taste of sour. Knowing this you can adjust your bread to suit your own taste.

Getting Started:

The instructions for the starter are pretty straight forward, you just start mixing flour and water to make a dough ball and keep adding flour and just enough water to make the dough stiff. You will start to notice after a few days that the dough seems to be breaking down and is much stickier than you left it. That's the bacteria and yeast consuming the sugars from the flour. When it gets to the point that you pull back the crusty shell and you see bubbles then your starter is ready.

Making Dough:

Once you go through the process of getting your starter going it's time to make the dough. First get your starter from the fridge and mix in 1 cup of flour as the recipe says. (*See Below*)



7:00 AM Thursday (*Waking up the starter*)



7:00 AM Thursday (*Adding the flour*)

It doesn't tell you to mix in enough water to form a ball. If you don't you will have flour left over that you can't knead in. Next, put in a larger bowl and cover with a wet towel and let set until it turns bubbly as shown below, Usually takes about 24 hours. *The wet towel keeps the dough moist. Notice how much the starter grew and flattened out.*



7:00 AM Thursday (*Cover starter*)



7:00 AM Friday (*Checking for bubbles*)

Then take about half and I mix it with enough flour to make nice soft dough and return it to the refrigerator to start another batch at a future time.



7:00 AM Friday (*Split starter*)



7:00 AM Friday (*Add warm water*)



7:00 AM Friday (*Add flour*)



7:00 AM Friday (*Looks like paste*)

With the other half (*See above*) I follow the recipe and add 2 cups of warm water and break up the starter and mix until all is dissolved. Add 2 cups flour and stir until mixed. Set this back in a warm spot and cover it with the wet towel again for about 12 to 24 hours When it's all bubbly and has a good sour smell its ready.



Once this mixture is all bubbly as shown here you are ready for the next step, mixing the final dough. The recipe says to use $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of the starter and follow their directions. I found this to not be very much bread and decided to make up the whole thing. There's about 3-3/4 cups of starter so I decided to make it all up, that's 5 times the recipe. I makes about 2 French Loafs and 3 or 4 baguettes (*this should make enough to share and isn't that what bread making is all about?*).

9:00 PM Friday (*Look at those bubbles*)

So in a very large bowl in goes the 12 cups of flour and about 7 1/2 tsp salt, mix the salt into the flour with a wooden spoon and add the starter. When you have these mixed as well as you can start to add the water. Here is where patience pays off, just add enough water to make a stiff dough, I know it's tough with a 15lb lump of dough but it needs to be well mixed.



9:00 PM Friday (*Pouring in the starter*)

Once it is mixed we are going to let it set yet again! (*Will this never end?*). Sure it will and the result will be spectacular. Put the big lump in a well oiled bowl that will seal like this Tupperware giant shown below and set in the fridge for at least 24 hours. The longer you leave it in the more sour your bread will be. Here is where you fine tune



your bread. I like to leave it in the fridge for about 24 hours and take it out and let it set with the lid cracked for about another 6 hours or so. The time will vary with your weather conditions so be patient. The way I know when the time is right is to pinch off a piece and taste it every so often. This way you will be able to taste when it has the right amount of sour for you.



9:00 PM Friday (*Starter mixed in*)

9:00 PM Friday (*BIG Ball of dough*)



6:00 AM Sunday (It is ready)

When you finally say enough is enough lets tear off a chunk stretch it into a loaf or baguette and place it on your loaf or baguette pan.



6:00 AM Sunday (Notice how it deflated)

Once you have the amount you want to use (*I usually use it all*) or if you are limited on pans you can return the rest to the fridge to bake later.

Tip:

When you stretch the dough be careful not to handle it too much by rolling it or kneading it, just stretch it into shape.

What I do for this final rise is put the pans in the oven covered with a towel (*dry at this point*) with the light on to add a little heat (*Thanks Mom*) making sure that it is a cool oven and it is off. This will allow the bread to rise in a warm place that is a fairly well controlled environment with no wind to dry out your dough.



6:00 AM Sunday

I usually plan to do this step before I go to bed at around 9 or 10 o'clock. When I get up at say 6 o'clock the bread is risen and ready to bake. This time I started at 6:00 in the morning and it was ready to bake just after noon on Sunday. I then take it out of the oven and preheat to 450 degrees.



While I'm waiting on that I cut the tops of the loaves with a razor and give them their first shower with a fine mist of water from a spray bottle.

12:00 Noon Sunday (Slashed)

When the oven has reached temperature place the pans in and give the whole interior and the loaves another good spray.

(I wouldn't spray the glass on the door though as it could break due to the thermal deformation.)

5 minutes into baking spray the interior and bread again. This will help to soften the crust and allow expansion in the bread and is a necessary step.



I usually bake for 22 to 25 minutes and the crust comes out perfect.

I then brush with a little butter to help prevent drying out too fast.

Nothing left to do now except enjoy.

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