

Adrian Hale's Communal Bread

We live in an imperfect world. At any rate, perfection is not what we're after. What we want is to live in a harmonious community and that's what this bread wants, too. So let's work together to make something imperfect that finds a way to be both nourishing and tasty, despite differences...no, BECAUSE of differences. Try this bread with what's on hand and let me know what you think.

I provide volume measurements for this recipe, but I highly recommend trying to find a scale and measuring by weight. You'll get better results and more consistency. I've tested this with many kinds of flours, and while there were slight differences, all had good results.

850 grams water (3 ½ cups)
50 grams sourdough starter (¼ cup)*
20 grams honey or sugar (1 tablespoon)
20 grams oil or melted butter (1 ½ tablespoons)
1000 grams whole wheat flour or a mix of all-purpose w (9 cups)
20 grams salt (1 tablespoon)

Mix the water, sourdough starter, honey, and oil in a large mixing bowl. This doesn't have to be fully incorporated, but simply mixed together a bit. Add the flour and salt and mix until there are no visible dry pockets of flour. Cover with a wet towel or a plate and let this mixture rest at room temperature for 8 to 12 hours. I often do this overnight to shape in the morning OR I'll mix first thing in the morning to shape when I get home from work in the evening.

After its long rest, fold the dough by grabbing the edges of one side and folding it towards the middle. Do this all the way around the bowl until all the edges are folded towards the middle. This usually takes about 4 to 8 folds around the bowl, depending on the flour. The folds de-gas the dough a little and provide a bit of structure for the shaping. After the folds, let it rest for 30 minutes to 1 hour. If you don't have time, simply go straight into shaping.

To shape, you need to make some choices. This recipe makes 2 loaves or 16 flatbreads that can be used for pita or pizza or grill bread.

To make the loaves, cut the dough in half. If you'd like to make one now and one later, put the dough you aren't going to bake into a container in the fridge and hold there for up to three days. It will get more sour over time, but still be perfectly tasty as the days go on.

For making the loaves now, preshape them by patting out the dough into a rectangle. With the long side of the rectangle vertical to you, fold the top towards the middle, then the bottom up with a little overlap. Next fold the left side in and then the right side, also with overlap. This process will make a seam, which is the bottom of your loaf. Flip it over to rest 5 to 10 minutes with this seam down. Get your loaf pans ready while it's

resting: butter or grease the bottom and sides of two standard size loaf pans. For the final shape, turn the seam side up again with the seam running vertical. Refold the top down and the bottom up with overlap. This time, instead of folding the left and right sides in, roll the dough from left to right into a kind of jellyroll shape and place the seam side down in the prepared loaf pan. Cover these pans with another loaf pan or a tent of foil. Proof at room temperature until the loaves gain enough volume to fill the pan; the tops usually reach just over the lip when I put them in the oven. About an hour into the proof, heat the oven to 450°F. When the loaves are finished proofing, bake them for 40 minutes total, keeping them covered for the first part of the bake and uncovering them for the last 20 minutes. Pop them out of the pan and let cool at room temperature.

To make flatbread, pita, or pizza dough, cut the dough in half (you can make one half into a loaf and the other into pita and pizza if you desire). Cut each half into eight pieces of relatively equal size. Shape each piece into a ball. Cover and let rest for 30 minutes to 1 hour. If you want to save some of these for later, put them on a baking sheet and store in the fridge for up to 3 days. For longer storage, put them on a sheet pan in the freezer and flash-freeze until solid, then transfer to a bag for easier storage. When you're ready to make them, bring to room temperature.

For pita, preheat the oven to 500°F. If you have a baking stone, put it in the oven, or you can also use a baking sheet. Pat out each ball into a round. You can use your fingertips and palms to flatten this out, loosening the bottom of the dough now and then from sticking to the table. Use flour liberally and flip the round from time to time to keep it from sticking. When the dough is well flattened, shake off the excess flour and put the rounds into the preheated oven. Let cook about 5 minutes until they puff up and then flip for another minute or so. Eat hot out of the oven, or soon after. They'll save in a ziptop bag for up to three days. As they stale, make them into chips!

For pizza, I find it best to roll this out with a rolling pin until pretty thin. Transfer to a pizza pan or baking stone and proceed with the toppings of your choice.

*If you don't have access to a sourdough starter, you can substitute a pinch ($\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon), but I highly recommend for purposes of both health and tastiness, that you find someone to share their sourdough starter with you.

Adrian Hale is a writer and educator. This recipe is just one of her generous gifts to bakers. Check out her website, <https://thousandbitesofbread.com/> for resources on home baking, finding great bakeries and mills on your travels. Talk with her about bread at adrian@communaltable.com