

Sourdough Factsheet

Using sourdough starter can be intimidating – even the name sounds like a secret! Think of it as a type of baking powder you tend like a plant, and maybe it won't be so scary.

Plain old ordinary people have been making naturally leavened breads for thousands of years. Baking soda was only patented in 1840, and baking powder was patented in 1865. Commercial yeast wasn't available until 1870. If people could bake bread without these things, you can too!

English muffins and tortilla are perfect for getting to know sourdough. Most of us are comfortable rolling dough, and stovetop cooking is simple. Shaping loaves and figuring out when sourdough is ready to bake is a bit more complicated, but these griddle breads are really straight forward.

THE BASICS

Sourdough is a common term for the process of natural leavening.

- *Starter* is a better name. Baked goods made from natural leavening don't have to be sour.
- *Starter* is a combination of wild yeasts and bacteria that feed on the carbohydrates and enzymes of flour.
- There's a lot of mystique about sourdough cultures but don't get trapped in origin stories. The magic begins when you get it, and cultivate a connection with your very own, very living thing.
- I don't recommend making a starter from scratch because everyone who keeps a starter has extra to share. Get some from a friend, or dried in the mail.

MAINTENANCE

Starter is the muscle that will make your bread rise. To maintain a lively culture of wild yeasts and bacteria, you need to feed the right ratios of water and flour at the right intervals.

In a bakery, the starter is constantly fed, which means it is constantly producing "discard." At home, you can park your starter in the fridge between baking and minimize the extra.

I keep about a quarter cup of fed starter in the refrigerator between baking. The trick is to refrigerate your starter at the peak of its life cycle, which is about 6-10 hours, depending on the warmth of your kitchen and other variables.

Timing

6-10 hours reflects the variations you'll see in starter according to conditions in your kitchen, and the type of flour you use.

Readiness

Spoon a small bit into a glass of water. When it floats, your starter is ready!

Feeding

I always use whole grain stone ground rye flour to feed my starter.

You can use any flour – just be consistent about the type you feed it so that you can get to know how your culture behaves.

- 30 g flour, 30 g water
- 1 ounce flour, 1 ounce water
- ¼ cup flour, 2 TBSP water

Sourdough English Muffins

- 1 tablespoon sourdough starter
- 230 g or 1 cup milk or water
- 230 g or 2 cups whole-wheat or high extraction flour
- 1/2 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon fine salt

OPTIONAL for the liquids, substitute 165g or ¾ cup pureed squash and 60g or ¼ cup milk/water

1. Stir the sourdough starter & milk or water in a large bowl. Break up clumps you're your fingers and add flour. Cover with a plate, and let rest on the counter for 8 to 12 hours.
2. Add a teaspoon of water to the baking soda and salt, and add this to the dough. Mix together for 2 minutes in the bowl, or knead for a couple of minutes on a lightly floured cloth or board.
3. Transfer the dough onto a lightly floured work surface. Using a rolling pin, flatten the dough to ½ - ¾ inch thick. Cut out rounds with a 3-inch biscuit cutter or glass. Keep re-forming and cutting the dough until you've got 8 muffins. The last one might be a tiny ball you roll in your palm.
4. Place these rounds on a flour or cornmeal-dusted baking sheet. Cover with a towel and let rest for 30 to 45 minutes.
5. Heat a griddle or a cast iron pan slowly, over low heat. Wait until the surface is thoroughly warm, and put the muffin onto the pan — no fat necessary. Add the muffins and cook 4 to 5 minutes. Flip the muffins, then tent the griddle with a baking sheet to create a type of oven and help dry the muffins out. Cook for 4 to 5 minutes more.
6. Turn off the heat and let the muffins sit on the griddle under the tent for about 5 to 10 minutes more. This will keep your nooks and crannies from being too gummy. (If using a cast iron pan, put a lid on top but don't make a tight fit. Keep a little part uncovered to let some heat and steam escape.)

Sourdough Tortillas

- 30 g starter
 - 120 g or ½ cup water or milk
 - 40 g or ¼ cup olive oil
 - 230 g or 2 cups whole wheat flour
 - 1 teaspoon salt
1. Mix together the starter, milk and olive oil. Work out any lumps with fingers or spoon. Add flour and salt, and mix thoroughly with stand mixer, or by kneading. Rest on the counter for two hours, or refrigerate until ready to use – up to 2 or 3 days.
 2. When ready to make, divide dough into 8 balls, cover with a damp towel, and let rest for 5-10 minutes. Roll thin on a lightly floured surface. Cook on a hot griddle and serve.

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Refreshing

I refresh my starter twice before making bread. This means I remove the starter from the fridge, divide it in half, and feed each half equal weights of flour and water. I let these sit on the counter for 6-10 hours, and then I take some from each jar to make English muffins, or tortillas.

Putting Your Starter in Park

Next, I feed these starters equal weights of flour and water again. Another 6-10 hours after this feeding interval, one jar of the starter is ready to make bread, and the other is ready to return to the fridge, and rest until the next week's baking time.

Resource list

- My friend Ellie Markovitch has great baking explanations & instructions for sourdough on her Instagram account, @elliemarkovitch and some on her website, Storycooking.com
- Maurizio Leo's The Perfect Loaf website & Instagram
- [Sourdough](#) or [Heirloom](#) by Sarah Owens
- [Heritage Baking](#) by Ellen King
- My sourdough English muffin recipe on TheKitchn.com & their sourdough series