

# Sourdough Bread



## Making Sourdough Bread

(condensed from "[Tartine Bread](#)" by Chad Robertson)

The country bread from Tartine Bakery in San Francisco has reached cult status among passionate bakers. The nature of bread baking at home is unpredictable, so you have to be patient as you learn. The level of activity of your starter, the humidity in your kitchen, the temperature during the rises, the time you allow for each step — all of these elements affect the bread and any change can impact your final loaf. Everything is measured in grams, so a kitchen scale is required. If you fall hard enough, you may end up with some other tools, and perhaps even milling your own flour! The final loaf is always a wonder, the holy grail for the serious home baker. Let's get started...

### Recipe:

- 200 grams leaven
- 900 grams white-bread flour
- 100 grams whole-wheat flour
- 20 grams fine sea salt
- 100 grams rice flour for dusting

### Step 1: Wake up the Leaven – 4 hours

- The night before baking, take out the starter from your fridge and "wake it up." Mix the starter with 200 grams of warm water and stir to disperse. Add 200 grams of flour (a combo of 150g bread flour, 25g whole wheat, 25g rye flour). Mix well.
- Cover with a towel and let rest at room temperature for 4 hours until it is aerated and puffy in appearance. It should smell like beer. I put a rubber band on the jar at the original level, then watch as it rises to 2-3 times as it wakes up!
- To test for readiness, drop a tablespoon of leaven into a bowl of room-temperature water; if it floats, it's ready to use. If it doesn't, allow more time to ferment.



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## Step 2: Mix Dough – 30 minutes

- In a large bowl, pour in 700 grams of warm water and add 200 grams of leaven (which should float!). Stir to disperse. Save extra leaven in the fridge for future loaves.
- Add 900 grams of white-bread flour and 100 grams of whole-wheat flour to bowl. Use your hands to mix until no traces of dry flour remain. The dough will be sticky and ragged.

## Step 3: The Rest Period – 30 minutes

- Cover bowl with a towel
- **Let dough rest** for 30 minutes at room temperature. This is the autolyze, where glutens swell, structure begins to form.

## Step 4: Add Salt – 5 minutes

- Add 20 grams fine sea salt and 50 grams warm water.
- Mix using your hands to integrate salt and water into dough thoroughly. The dough will begin to pull apart, but continue mixing; it will come back together.

## Step 5: Bulk Fermentation – 2 to 4 hours

- Cover dough with a towel and transfer to a warm environment, 75 to 80 degrees ideally (like near a window in a sunny room, or inside a turned-off oven).
- Let dough rise for 30 minutes.
- Fold dough by dipping hand in water, taking hold of the underside of the dough at one quadrant and stretching it up over the rest of the dough.
- Repeat this action 3 more times, every 30 minutes, rotating bowl a quarter turn for each fold, vigorously at the start, and gentle at the end. Do this for 2 1/2 to 3 hours total. The dough should be billowy and increase in volume 20 to 30 percent. If not, continue to let rise and fold for up to an hour more.

## Step 6: Bench Rest – 30 minutes

- Remove dough from bowl to a work surface. Lightly flour the dough.
- Cut dough into 2 equal pieces and keep floured sides down.
- Assess how the dough feels. Should I give it a long bench rest to develop more strength, or should I shape the dough twice to give more tension?
- If the dough feels heavy, or the room has cooled down, give it more bench time to develop – perhaps an extra 15 minutes. Take your time.
- Take one round, and starting at the side closest to you, pull the bottom 2 corners of the dough down toward you, then fold them up into the middle third of the dough. Repeat this action on the right and left sides, pulling the edges out and folding them in over the center. Finally, lift the top corners up and fold down over previous folds. (Imagine folding a piece of paper in on itself from all 4 sides.)
- Roll dough over so the folded side becomes the bottom of the loaf.
- Shape into a smooth, taut ball. I use the scraper to get it tight.
- Repeat with other piece of dough.
- Place the 2 dough rounds on a work surface, cover with a towel, and let rest 30 minutes.

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## Step 7: The Final Rise – 3 hours OR 12 hours overnight in the fridge

- Line two 10- to 12-inch bread-proofing baskets or mixing bowls with towels. Use some rice flour mixture to generously flour towels.
- Transfer rounds, seam-side up, to prepared baskets and cover with a towel.
  - **If baking today**, return dough to the 75- to 80-degree environment for 3 to 4 hours.
  - **If baking tomorrow**, let dough rise for 10 to 12 hours in the refrigerator. Bring back to room temperature before baking. The longer the dough waits, the more sour it will get.

## Step 8: Baking the Bread! – 35 minutes per loaf

- About 15 minutes before baking, place a Dutch oven (or in my case, Pyrex mixing bowls) in the oven and heat it to 550 degrees.
- Get the bread dough balls out of the fridge, dust tops of dough with flour and score the top to allow the bread to expand.
- Very carefully remove heated bottom from oven. Gently turn the loaf into pan seam-side down. Transfer loaf and bottom to oven and cover with hot top from the oven.
- Reduce temperature to **450 degrees and cook for 30 minutes with the lid on** for the steam.
- After 30 minutes, **remove lid and cook for 10 more minutes** or until crust is a rich, golden brown color. The bread should be 212°F, light in the hand, and the bottom of the loaf should sound hollow when tapped.
- Transfer bread to a wire rack to cool for at least 15 minutes before slicing.



## Don't Forget...

The remaining leaven is your new starter. Continue to feed it if you plan to bake again soon or hold in an airtight container in the refrigerator for future use. When you want to bake again, begin feeding the starter a few days beforehand until it once again behaves predictably.

**Online resources: You can spend the rest of your life watching sourdough videos on YouTube. My favorites:**

1. [Master class by Patrick Ryan of Firehouse Bakery](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FVfJTGpXnU&t=593s)  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FVfJTGpXnU&t=593s>)
2. [A Non-Baker's Guide to Making Sourdough Bread](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APEavQg8rMw)  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APEavQg8rMw>)
3. [Step by Step No-Knead Sourdough Bread](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NwsTxK1Xmqk)  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NwsTxK1Xmqk>)
4. [Full Proof Baking – How to Make Open Crumb Sourdough](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIJEjW-QSnQ)  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIJEjW-QSnQ>)