

Recipe: Basic Sourdough Boule

Kathleen Quiring | Becoming Peculiar



A Few Introductory Remarks

1. If you're a beginner, I highly advise you to read through [Kate's Sourdough 101 post](#) before you start. It'll answer all your questions about how to acquire, care for, and use sourdough starter. When I got started I printed the whole thing out and underlined the most important parts. It helped me a ton.

2. You're going to need to get your hands on a good, active starter. If you don't currently have one, ask around your local friends. Put out a request on Facebook. Sourdough bakers always have plenty to spare, due to its constantly-expanding nature, and we love to share it. That's how I got mine. (And if you're local to me, ask me!) If this doesn't work out, you can buy it online. I've heard great things about [Simple Life by Kels](#).

3. You'll need a large soup pot or dutch oven with a lid to bake your loaf in. Even better if you have two, so you can bake both loaves at once. (Actually, I have one friend who has used a roasting pan, and another who used a large ceramic casserole dish with lid. You can get creative. It just needs a lid.)

4. You'll need to feed your starter the night before Baking Day. (I'll explain how to do this). Everything else happens the next day. Choose a day when you'll be home most of the day.

Here's a rough timeline of how this is going to go down:

- **Morning:** Mix dough
- **Afternoon:** Knead
- **Evening:** Shape, score, and bake

The first two parts are super-simple, quick, and flexible -- the time between can vary by a few hours as needed. You don't even need to be home in between.

Part three requires a little more attention and is slightly less flexible.

You can stick your dough or formed loaves in the fridge at any point in the process to delay it, even for a day or two, but my fridge is always full, so I prefer the same-day method.

So: you've got your sourdough starter and you're ready to go. Let's do this!

Recipe:

- 1 cup active starter
- 1 1/2 cups water
- 3 Tbsp olive oil
- 3 Tbsp honey (or sugar)
- 4 1/4 cups organic white all-purpose flour
- 2 1/2 tsp salt

(Note: this makes two medium loaves. For your first try, you might want to halve the recipe and do just one loaf.)

Instructions

The night before baking day, take your sourdough starter out of the fridge and feed it. I feed it about 1 cup of flour and 3/4 cups filtered water. It should fill a quart jar about halfway, giving it room to expand overnight.

Leave it on the counter to grow.

Morning: Mix dough (Between 8:00-10:00am)

Stir down the starter to measure it more accurately.

Mix the liquid ingredients in a small bowl or large measuring cup. Mix the flour and salt in a large bowl. Then pour the liquid into the dry mixture and mix well, first with a spoon, then with your hands. Don't worry too much about kneading now. You'll do a thorough job later. Just get it well-blended.

Loosely cover the bowl (I use the lid of the bowl; you can use a damp dish towel, beeswax wrap, or plastic wrap) and put it in a warmish oven to rise. (To warm the oven I do this: turn on the oven to 350 and set the timer for ONE MINUTE. As soon as it goes off, turn everything off. It just warms up the oven a little bit.)

Meanwhile, feed your starter in your jar (I do about 1/2 cup of flour, 5/8 cup of water) and put it back in the fridge. It's done its job for the day.

2-4 hours later (Between 10:00-noon): Knead Down Dough

Here's where you do a good, thorough knead to give the gluten its structure so it can rise nicely. Punch it down (it should have risen substantially by now), dump it out on a floured counter top, and knead with floury hands until it's smooth and elastic.

Put it back in the bowl, sprinkle with flour, cover, and put it back in the warmish oven for a second rise.

4-6 Hours Later (between 2:00-6:00pm): Shape Loaves and Final Rise

Your dough should have about doubled. Punch it down gently and dump it onto a floured counter top again.

Using a serrated bread knife, divide the dough into two (if you're doing a whole batch). Using a kneading action, shape them into two ovals. Try not to overwork it, though, if you want that nice open (i.e. holey) crumb.

Cut two pieces of parchment paper, sprinkle with flour, and lay down your loaves on them, seam/ugly side down. Now sprinkle and rub the tops generously with flour (This is mostly for aesthetic purposes -- it helps your scoring stand out better later).

Cover your loaves with a towel and let them rise for about an hour. They don't have to double because they'll rise some more in the hot oven.

1 Hour Later (Between 3:00-7:00pm): Baking the Loaves

Note: you will bake the loaves in two steps: first, inside heated, closed pots; second, on a baking sheet or stone.

After your loaves have been resting for about an hour, it's time to heat the oven and pots. (The loaves will continue rising a little longer while everything heats up).

Place your pot(s)/dutch oven(s) with their lids into your oven, and set the temperature to 450F. It should take 10-20 minutes to reach that temp.

Once everything is hot, you can score your loaves. This is the fun part!

One of the easiest designs is just a couple of diagonal slashes across the top. It's very attractive and classic. (I'll share photos at the bottom.) I typically just use a serrated knife for that.

OR, if you want to get fancy, you can use a razor blade. That's what I used on the loaves in this post.

I cut one long slash along one side, and then a series of short, shallow cuts along the other to make a leaf pattern, like this:



Once your loaves are ready to go, carefully remove the pots from the oven and place on a heat-safe surface; remove the lids.

With each loaf: lift the parchment paper by its four corners and carefully lower the bread into the pot. (It will bake on the parchment paper for the first part.) Then put on the lids and put them in the oven. (Baking the loaf inside a closed pot at this point will seal in the steam and give you a wonderfully crisp crust). **Bake like this for 15 minutes.**

The next phase of the baking process is done on a baking stone or baking sheet.

After the 15 minutes are up, remove the pots from the oven.

Wearing oven mitts, carefully lift out the loaves by the parchment paper. They should have sprung up in size, and the slashes will have opened up so you can see the finished design. Fun!

I find that baking too long on parchment paper burns the bottom, so I want to get them off of there. It's time for these loaves to get some air, anyway.

Carefully slide your loaves off the parchment paper onto a baking sheet or stone. (I prefer stone, but not everyone has one.)

Pop this back into the hot oven and bake for another 20-25 minutes, until nice and brown.

Remove to a cooling rack to cool. Give them at least 30 minutes to settle down. You don't want the inside to be all gummy from cutting into them too soon.

Time to eat!

Note: this sourdough bread tastes INCREDIBLE the day it's baked. But it gets stale very quickly. The next day it's still good, but better toasted. (*Delicious* when toasted and buttered alongside soup or stew.)

I always freeze the second loaf as soon as it's cool to preserve its freshness as much as possible. Often I cut it in half before bagging it so I can take out half at a time.

Whatever is left on the counter after my family rabidly attacks it, I wrap in beeswax wrap for the next morning. It's more breathable than plastic.