



THE WAY THE COOKIE CRUMBLES

A FOOD BLOG

Tartine's Basic Country Bread (rewritten from *Tartine Bread*)

Makes 2 large loaves

The only ingredients in this bread are flour, water and some salt at the end. However, they're mixed at so many different stages in the process that I've chosen not to include an ingredient list. Instead, the ingredients are bolded in the directions.

For pizza, I like to add a squeeze of honey (or a spoonful of sugar) to the dough to help it brown in the oven. The bread doesn't get the same beautiful burnished color as the loaf because it isn't covered.

Make the starter:

I've provided precise measurements here, but it is not necessary to follow them exactly as long as your starter always has the consistency of a thick batter.

1. Mix 1 cup room temperature filtered water with $\frac{1}{2}$ cup white bread flour and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup whole wheat flour. Cover the bowl with a kitchen towel and set aside in a cool, shaded spot for two days. (I use a jar with a paper towel over the top.)
2. Check the culture to see if any bubbles have formed around the sides and on the surface. If not, let it sit for another day. The culture is ready when it smells like stinky cheese and tastes very acidic. It's okay if a dark crust has formed on top.
3. Discard three-quarters of the culture. To the remaining culture, add $\frac{3}{4}$ cup water, 6 tablespoons white bread flour and 6 tablespoons whole wheat flour. Stir vigorously until there are no lumps. Repeat this step once a day until...
4. Your starter is finished when it behaves in a predictable pattern after each feeding, from stinky and sharply acidic before feeding and sweet and milky just after feeding. The volume should increase for several hours after feeding, then begin to collapse.

To store and keep your starter: Lightly covered, the starter can be kept indefinitely in the refrigerator. (My mom keeps hers in a covered pitcher; I keep mine in a canning jar with a paper towel screwed on instead of the lid. A bowl with a cover would work fine.) To keep it active and healthy, feed it every week or two by following the directions below to make leaven for bread (step 1 of the bread recipe).

Make the bread:

1. To make the leaven: Discard all but **1 tablespoon of the starter**. Feed the remaining starter with **200 grams of warm water**, **100 grams of whole wheat flour**, and **100 grams of bread flour**. Let the mixture rise overnight at room temperature. When it's ready, the leaven should have risen slightly, float in room temperature water (test a small piece; you can still use this piece in the final dough), and smell like overripe fruit.

2. In a large (huge, actually) bowl, mix **700 grams of water** and **200 grams of the leaven**. (The remainder of the leaven is starter that you'll store and feed regularly.) Add **800 grams of bread flour** and **200 grams of whole wheat flour**; stir until the flour is evenly moistened. The dough won't be smooth. Let it rest for 25 to 40 minutes while the gluten starts forming, the flour starts hydrating, and the flavor starts developing.
3. Add **20 grams of salt** and **50 grams of water** to the dough, and squeeze the dough to mix them in. This dough isn't kneaded; instead, fold it a few times by using a dough scraper to scoop up one side of the dough and drape it over the rest of the dough.
4. Allow the dough to ferment for 3 to 4 hours, and give it another few turns every 30 minutes. This takes the place of kneading. Be more gentle with the turning toward the end of the rising time. The dough is ready when it's slightly increased in volume and is full of air bubbles (which will be visible on the sides if you've used a clear container).
5. Turn the dough out onto floured surface or a damp kitchen towel. Divide it into two portions. To shape each one into a round, cup your hands over the top of the dough and rotate the dough around on the counter. Cover the rounds with a damp towel and set them aside to rest for 20 to 30 minutes.
6. To increase the surface tension of the dough, ensuring that the bread rises up and not out in the oven, perform a series of folds. Working with one ball of dough at a time, stretch it out and fold it over several times, eventually ending up with a neat square. Cup your hands around the dough and rotate it on the counter to smooth the surface again.
7. Transfer each round to a floured towel-lined bowl or basket with seam facing up. (Actually, I prefer to use an oiled bowl, covered with a damp towel. If you want to freeze the dough, transfer it to a zip-top bag sprayed with nonstick spray and store in the freezer. Let it defrost overnight in the refrigerator before continuing with the recipe.) Let rise for 2-4 hours at room temperature or, for maximum flavor, overnight in refrigerator.
8. Half an hour before you're ready to bake the bread, remove the dough from the refrigerator. Place a Dutch oven and its lid on the middle rack in the oven and heat the oven to 500 degrees. Turn the dough out of its bowl onto a floured work surface or a damp kitchen towel so that the seam is down. Use a very sharp or serrated knife to cut four intersecting ½-inch deep slashes in the dough, forming a square of cuts. Carefully place the dough into the heated Dutch oven; cover the pot with its lid and transfer it to the oven. Immediately reduce the oven temperature to 450 degrees. Bake 20 minutes, then remove the lid and bake 20-25 minutes longer, until the bread is deep golden brown and an instant-read thermometer inserted into the center of the loaf reads about 205 degrees. Remove the bread from the pan and cool on wire rack for an hour before serving.