



blissful
bites.

SOURDOUGH FROM SCRATCH

**The Beginners Guide To
Your First Perfect Loaf**

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Introduction

Welcome to your sourdough journey!

My adventure with sourdough began in 2022 when I moved into my first home. Like many, I was drawn to the allure of crafting something special from scratch. After a trip to Cape Town, where I tasted my first artisan sourdough, I was hooked. Despite early setbacks—flat loaves and sluggish starters—the satisfaction of pulling a golden, crusty loaf from the oven kept me going.

Inspired by bakers like Addie Roberts ([@breadstalker](#)), I've turned this hobby into a passion, and now I'm here to share what I've learned. Sourdough is more than just bread; it's about connection, patience, and the joy of sharing something homemade. Whether you're new to baking or just to sourdough, this guide is designed to help you avoid common pitfalls and start baking with confidence.

Let's get started!

Dani



Essential Tools & Ingredients

Non-Negotiable Tools for Sourdough Beginners

Kitchen Scale

Precision is key in sourdough baking. Cups and volumetric measurements just won't cut it if you want consistent, reliable results. A kitchen scale ensures you're using the right amount of each ingredient, which is crucial for success.

[Get it here](#)

Bowl Scraper

This tool is invaluable for mixing your dough, scraping it out of the bowl, and keeping the sides of the bowl clean. It helps you handle sticky dough with ease.

[Get it here](#)

Small Spatula for Starter

Perfect for scraping down the sides of your starter jar and performing the mini stretch and folds that help strengthen your starter.

Tip: A small spatula makes it easier to keep your jar clean and your starter well-mixed.

[Get it here](#)

Wide-Mouth Jar

A wide-mouth jar allows for better airflow and easier access when feeding and stirring your starter. It also makes it easier to observe the starter's activity.

Tip: Avoid using narrow mason jars; the wide-mouth design is much more practical.

Essential Tools & Ingredients

Glass or Wooden Mixing Bowl	A heavier bowl is ideal for mixing and folding your dough, as it stays in place better than a lightweight plastic one. It's especially helpful during coil folds.	
Dutch Oven	Essential for creating the perfect baking environment. The Dutch oven traps steam, which is crucial for achieving that beautiful, glossy, blistered crust.	
Oven Mitts	The Dutch oven gets extremely hot, so thick oven mitts are a must to protect your hands when handling it.	
Wide-Mouth Jar	A wide-mouth jar allows for better airflow and easier access when feeding and stirring your starter. It also makes it easier to observe the starter's activity. Tip: Avoid using narrow mason jars; the wide-mouth design is much more practical.	
Bread Lame	Scoring your dough allows it to expand properly in the oven, preventing it from cracking in random places.	Get it here

Essential Tools & Ingredients

Banneton/Proofing Basket

While you can use a colander lined with a kitchen cloth in a pinch, a banneton makes proofing easier and gives you the flexibility to shape batards (longer loaves) as well as boules (round loaves).

[Get it here](#)

Bench Scraper

While your bowl scraper can double as a bench scraper, having a dedicated bench scraper makes it easier to gather excess flour and move your dough around the counter.

[Get it here](#)

Kitchen Thermometer

Monitoring the temperature of your kitchen and dough can be a game-changer. It helps you understand how temperature affects your bread. On colder days, you can even use your oven with the light on to maintain a warm environment, checking the temperature with your thermometer to ensure it doesn't get too hot.

[Get it here](#)

Oven Thermometer

I highly recommend an oven thermometer. I realised my bakes were not coming out as expected, and when I finally got an oven thermometer, I discovered my oven was 60°C hotter than what the dial indicated.

[Get it here](#)

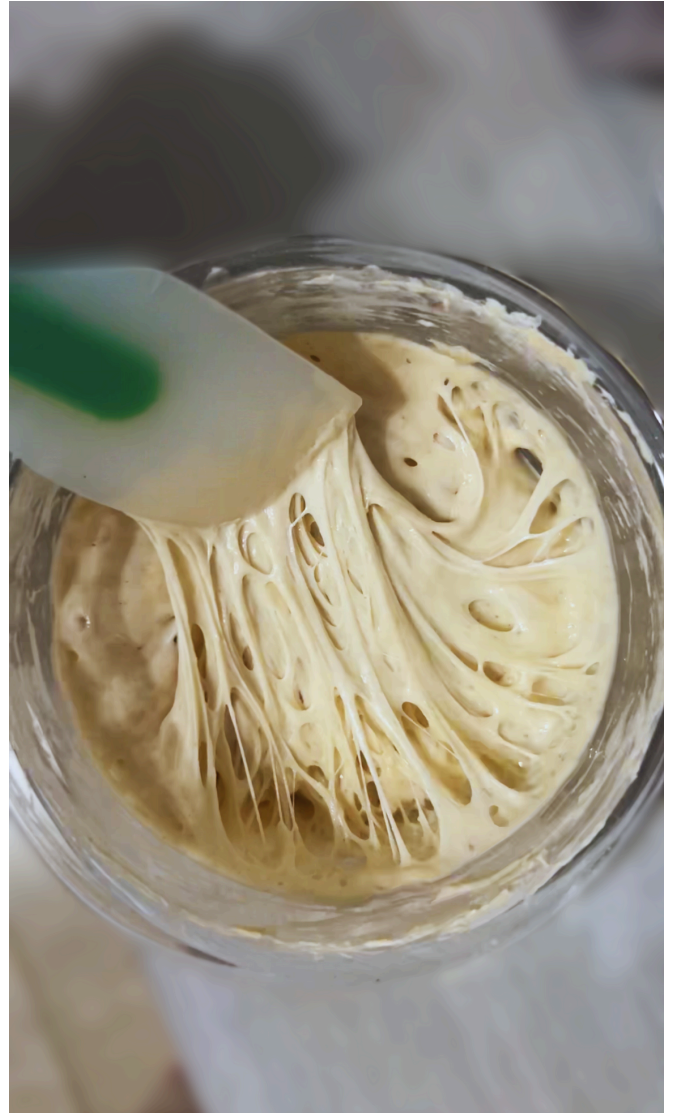
Creating Your Sourdough Starter

Starting Your Own Sourdough Starter

Starting your own sourdough starter is like embarking on a little science experiment in your kitchen. It's the foundation of every great loaf of sourdough, and while it may seem intimidating at first, I'm here to guide you through each step.

Choosing the Right Flour

For creating a starter and baking, I recommend using *strong white bread flour*. The high protein content helps in building a strong and active starter that will give your bread a great rise and structure. For those in South Africa, I've had the best results with Gideon Milling and Eureka Mills flours—both are excellent choices for a successful starter and bread.



Starter Timeline

This timeline will guide you through the first few days of creating your sourdough starter. Remember, the process can vary slightly depending on your kitchen environment and the flour you use, so don't worry if your starter's progress is a bit different.

Day 1:

- AM (Morning):
 - Mix: 50g flour with 50g water.
 - Rest: Keep it at 27–28°C (80–83°F), slightly covered.
- PM (Evening):
 - Stir: The mixture will be runny. Stir once and let it rest overnight.

Day 2:

- AM:
 - Feed: Take 50g of the mixture, add 50g flour and 50g water. Rest at 27–28°C (80–83°F).
- PM:
 - Stir: After 5–6 hours, stir the mixture and let it rest overnight.

Day 3:

- AM:
 - Feed: Take 50g starter, add 50g flour and 50g water. Rest at 27–28°C (80–83°F). It usually starts to smell weird at this point – that's how you know something is happening!
- PM:
 - Stir: After 5–6 hours, stir the mixture and let it rest overnight.

Day 4:

- AM:
 - Feed: Take 40g starter, add 40g flour and 40g water. Lower temperature to 24–25°C (75–76°F) and let it rest.
- PM:
 - Stir: After 5–6 hours, stir the mixture and let it rest overnight.

Creating Your Sourdough Starter

Day 5:

- AM:
 - Feed: Take 40g starter, add 40g flour and 40g water. Rest at 24–25°C (75–76°F).
- PM:
 - Stir: After 5–6 hours, stir the mixture and let it rest overnight.

Day 6:

- AM:
 - Feed: Reduce the starter amount to 20g, add 40g flour and 40g water. Rest at 24–25°C (75–76°F).
- PM:
 - Stir: After 5–6 hours, stir the mixture and let it rest overnight.

Day 7:

- AM:
 - Feed: If your starter is consistently tripling in size, reduce the starter amount to 10g, add 40g flour and 40g water. Rest at 24–25°C (75–76°F).
- PM:
 - Stir: After 2–3 hours, do mini stretch and folds. Continue to feed every 12 hours.

Day 8 Onwards:

- AM:
 - Feed: Continue with the adjusted feeding ratio based on your starter's behaviour. Monitor how fast it rises and falls.
- PM:
 - Stir: Continue with regular feeding and monitoring.

Final Notes:

- Adjustments: As your starter gains strength, adjust the feeding ratio as needed. If it's rising and falling quickly, consider feeding more often or reducing the starter amount.

Consistency: The starter should be bubbly, active, and ready to use after 10 days of care.

Creating Your Sourdough Starter

Maintaining Your Starter

Once your starter is established, you'll want to keep it healthy and active. Here's how:

- **Regular Feedings:** Feed your starter every 12-24 hours if kept at room temperature. Consistency is key to maintaining an active and strong starter.
- **Long-Term Storage:** If you need to take a break from baking, you can refrigerate your starter. The important thing is to refrigerate it for about 6 hours after its last feeding. When storing it in the fridge, try not to leave it there for longer than a week. If you see a liquid layer called "hooch" on top, pour it off before refreshing the starter. To revive it, take 10g of starter and feed it at a 1:4:4 ratio (10g starter: 40g flour: 40g water) every 12 hours for at least 2 days before using it to bake. This ensures it's active and strong enough to leaven your bread.

What is "Hooch"?

Hooch is a grey, watery liquid that can form on top of your starter when it hasn't been fed in a while. It often smells like acetone or alcohol, which is a sign that the yeast is starving. While hooch isn't harmful, it's best to pour it off and give your starter a good feeding to get it back to a healthy state.

Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

- **Don't Let Your Starter Get Too Hungry:** It's important to keep a regular feeding schedule. On hot days, your starter may become more active and require more frequent feedings.
- **Understanding Peak Activity:** Peak activity is when your starter is at its most bubbly and active, not necessarily when it's domed at the top. A bubbly, airy, and strong starter is what you're aiming for.
- **What If My Starter Isn't Developing?** If you see any signs of mould, it's best to throw the starter away and start over. If it's just sluggish, try feeding it more often or moving it to a warmer spot.

Baking Your First Loaf

Now that your starter is healthy and active, it's time for the main event—baking your first sourdough loaf! This process involves several steps, but I'll walk you through each one to ensure your success. Remember, the first loaf is always a learning experience, so don't worry if it's not perfect. You'll get better with each bake.

Basic Sourdough Recipe for Beginners

Ingredients:

- 252g water (filtered or boiled, then cooled) (72%)
- 70g active sourdough starter (20%)
- 350g white bread flour (I recommend Gideon Milling or Eureka Mills) (100%)
- 7g salt (2%)

Timeline:

- **Evening (Day Before Starting you start your bread):** Feed your starter to prepare it for the next day.
 - Feed 10g starter with 40g water and 40g flour (1:4:4 ratio). Let it sit at 22 – 24C for about 12 hours.



Step 1: Mix the Dough

- Morning (Day of Making Dough):
- In a mixing bowl, combine 252g water with 70g active starter. Whisk together until well mixed.
- Add 350g bread flour to the bowl and combine with a bowl scraper until no dry spots of flour are visible. Cover the bowl and let it rest for 20 minutes (this is called autolyse).

Step 2: Add Salt and Begin Stretch and Folds

- After the dough has rested, sprinkle 7g of salt on top.
- Wet your hands to prevent sticking, and “poke” the salt into the dough.
- TIP: We don’t add salt and starter together—salt negatively impacts gluten development, so we give our dough some time to develop first.
- Begin the Stretch and Fold Process:
 - Gently lift one side of the dough and fold it over onto itself. Turn the bowl and repeat on all sides until the dough begins to resist. Cover and let it rest for 45 minutes.

Step 3: Perform Coil Folds and Bulk Fermentation

- Coil Folds:
 - Perform the first set of coil folds by lifting the dough from the middle and letting the ends fold underneath. Repeat this process every 45 minutes, for a total of four sets of coil folds. Cover the dough after each set.
- Bulk Fermentation:
 - After the final coil fold, let the dough rest and finish bulk fermentation. Bulk fermentation starts once you add your starter.
 - This could take 3–8 hours, depending on the temperature of your kitchen. At 22–24°C on average, it takes about 6/7 hours. But watch the dough, not the clock!

How to Know It's Ready:

- The dough should look puffy and alive, with bubbles on the surface. It won't necessarily double in size like yeasted bread, so don't expect that. Trust your eyes and feel—if your first loaf is too dense, increase the bulk fermentation time next time. If it's flat and lifeless, reduce the time.

Step 4: Shaping the Dough

- Shaping:
 - Shaping is easier than it seems. I typically shape my dough straight out of the bulk fermentation container.
 - Lightly flour the surface of the dough, but not too much—the dough needs some resistance to tighten up. Turn the dough out onto the counter. You can use a bench scraper with a little flour all around the dough to make sure it's not sticking to the counter.
 - Shape the dough according to your preferred method.
 - For a Round Boule: [watch this video](#)
 - For a Batard: [watch this video](#)
 - I usually pinch the sides closed before placing it in the banneton. You can “stitch” the dough by pinching the seam together about 5-10 minutes after placing it in the banneton, if the dough is not too tight and doesn't rise too much (this helps with structure during baking).

Step 5: Overnight Proof

- Cover the dough with plastic wrap or place it in a covered banneton and let it proof in the fridge overnight (up to 48 hours if your fridge stays really cold).
- Sometimes, if I feel like I may have cut the bulk fermentation short, I give the dough extra time for the cold proof.
- During the overnight proof, you should aim for a around 15% rise in your dough (this is not an exact amount but rather an estimate).
- It should look puffy and “happy”, like it's ready to burst with pride.
- This takes time to recognise, but don't be scared of overproofing—underproofing is more common.

Step 6: Scoring and Baking

1. Preheat:

- a. The next morning, preheat your oven with your Dutch oven inside (with the lid on) for 45 minutes to 1 hour at 250°C (482°F).

2. Prepare the Dough:

- a. Cut a piece of baking paper as wide as your bread and twice as long. When the oven is ready, take your dough out of the fridge and gently tip it onto the baking paper.

3. Initial Baking:

- a. Place the dough directly into the preheated Dutch oven without scoring it. Cover with the lid and bake for 5 minutes. This allows the dough to set slightly, making it easier to score.

4. Scoring:

- a. After 5 minutes, remove the Dutch oven from the oven and carefully take off the lid. Working quickly, score the dough with a sharp bread lame or razor blade at a 45-degree angle.

5. Continue Baking:

- a. Return the lid to the Dutch oven and place it back in the oven. Continue baking at 250°C (482°F) for 15 more minutes.

6. Remove lid:

- a. After the initial 20 minutes of baking (5 minutes pre-scoring and 15 minutes post-scoring), remove the lid and lower the temperature to 210°C (410°F). Bake for another 20–25 minutes, depending on how dark you like your crust. I like it a deep brown.

7. Cooling:

- a. Remove the loaf from the oven and transfer it to a cooling rack. Allow the bread to cool completely—this can take at least an hour. As tempting as it is, avoid cutting into hot bread; it can make the crumb gummy.

Troubleshooting Common Problems

Baking sourdough is a journey, and it's normal to run into a few bumps along the way. Here are some of the most common problems beginners face, along with tips on resolving them.

Dense Crumb

Problem: Your loaf comes out with a dense, tight crumb instead of an open, airy one.

Causes & Solutions:

- **Underproofing:** This is a common cause of a dense crumb. The dough didn't ferment long enough during the bulk fermentation stage, leading to a lack of gas production and a tight structure.
 - **Solution:** Extend the bulk fermentation time. The dough should feel light and puffy, with visible bubbles on the surface. Remember, it may not double in size like yeasted dough.



One of my first very underproofed loaves

Troubleshooting Common Problems

- **Weak or Sour Starter:** If your starter isn't well-maintained or has become too sour, it might not produce enough gas to properly leaven your bread, resulting in a denser crumb.
 - **Solution:** Ensure your starter is active, bubbly, and not overly acidic before using it. Regular feedings, especially in the days leading up to baking, can help maintain a healthy, balanced starter. If your starter has become too sour, refresh it with a higher feeding ratio (like 1:6:6) to bring it back to a more neutral state.

Lack of Rise

Problem: Your dough doesn't rise as expected during proofing or baking.

Causes & Solutions:

- **Starter Not Active Enough:** A sluggish or inactive starter won't provide the lift your dough needs.
 - **Solution:** Ensure your starter is at its peak activity before mixing the dough. It should be bubbly, airy, and have doubled in size within 4-6 hours after feeding.
- **Underproofing:** If your dough hasn't risen sufficiently during the bulk fermentation or final proof, it may lack the energy to rise in the oven.
 - **Solution:** Extend the proofing time. You can perform a "poke test"—gently poke the dough, and if it springs back slowly and leaves a slight indentation, it's ready for baking.

The Myth of the Big Ear

Many bakers strive for a big, prominent ear on their sourdough. However, in my experience, a big ear often indicates that the dough was underproofed. While an ear can look impressive, the most important aspect of your loaf is its overall structure and crumb. Don't focus solely on achieving an ear; instead, aim for a well-proofed, evenly-baked loaf.



A well-proofed loaf with a small "ear"

Staying Inspired

Baking sourdough can be a deeply rewarding experience, but like any journey, it has its ups and downs. Staying motivated and inspired is key to growing your skills and enjoying the process.

Finding Joy in the Process

Baking sourdough is not just about the end result; it's about the journey. The tactile experience of working with dough, the anticipation as your loaf bakes, and the satisfaction of slicing into a fresh loaf are all part of what makes sourdough so special. Even when things don't go as planned, remember that every loaf teaches you something new.

Connecting with the Sourdough Community

One of the best ways to stay inspired is by connecting with other sourdough enthusiasts. There's a vibrant community of bakers online who share tips, successes, and even their failures. Here are a few ways to get involved:

- **Social Media:** Follow hashtags like #sourdoughbread, #sourdoughstarter, and #sourdoughbaking to see what other bakers are creating. You can also share your own bakes using these hashtags and connect with others who are on the same journey.
- **Instagram:** Consider following bakers who inspire you. For example, Addie Roberts (@breadstalker_) has been a huge influence on my own baking journey, and her feed is full of beautiful, open-crumb loaves.
- **Facebook Groups:** There are many active Facebook groups dedicated to sourdough baking. These groups are great for asking questions, sharing your progress, and learning from others.

Join the Blissful Bites Community

- I'd love to see your sourdough creations and hear about your baking experiences! Join the Blissful Bites community by following me on Instagram and using the hashtag #BlissfulBitesSourdough when you share your bakes. Whether it's a perfect loaf or a learning experience, every post contributes to our shared journey of learning and growth.

Keep Experimenting and Learning

Sourdough baking is a craft that evolves over time. As you grow more comfortable with the basics, don't be afraid to experiment with different flours, hydration levels, and techniques. Each variation will teach you more about the dough and how to work with it.

If you ever feel stuck or discouraged, remember that every baker has been there at some point. Keep experimenting, stay curious, and above all, enjoy the process. The more you bake, the more confident and skilled you'll become.



Conclusion

Baking sourdough can be a deeply rewarding experience, but like any journey, it has its ups and downs. Staying motivated and inspired is key to growing your skills and enjoying the process.

Your Sourdough Journey is Just Beginning

Congratulations on completing your first steps into the world of sourdough baking! Whether your first loaf turned out exactly as you hoped or if it was a bit of a learning experience, know that you've already accomplished something amazing. Sourdough is a journey of patience, practice, and passion, and with each bake, you'll continue to improve.

What's Next?

I'm excited to share that I'm working on a full guide to advanced sourdough techniques. This comprehensive book will help you refine your skills, tackle higher hydration doughs, and overcome any challenges you encounter. It will also include insider tips on reducing starter acidity, increasing protein content in South African flours, and much more.

Exclusive Discount Coming Soon

As a thank you for being part of this community, I'll be offering an exclusive discount on the full guide when it's released. Since you're already signed up for my newsletter, you'll be the first to know when it launches and receive your discount code directly in your inbox.

Stay Connected

In the meantime, let's keep the conversation going! Follow me on Instagram for more tips, recipes, and sourdough inspiration. Don't forget to share your bakes using the hashtag #BlissfulBitesSourdough—I'd love to see what you create!

- [Follow me on Instagram](#)

Thank you for being part of this sourdough adventure. Your support means the world to me, and I'm excited to continue baking alongside you!