

Maintaining your Sourdough starter!

By: Elizabeth Harrison

If you have any questions about anything, don't hesitate to reach out! 😊

Equipment:

- Straight sided mason jar (I use quart size)
- Mason jar lids (have the rings handy)
- Food scale (preferably)
- Flour of choice (unbleached)
- Pure water (non chlorinated)
- Starter
- Rubber band or dry erase marker to mark your growth
- Non metal stirring utensil

Did you know if properly taken care of, your starter can live for years and years?! There are starters that have been passed down over 40 generations, awesome! The key is getting to know your starter, knowing how to maintain it, how much starter to always keep as a baseline.

When people hear sourdough, I think their mind usually thinks about how difficult it must be to maintain something like that. It's just another thing to care for, and something else to think about in advance. But I'm here to tell you just the opposite. Sourdough can make life easier. If I have some sourdough starter, there are so many different recipes I can just whip up. As for bread, once you get used to the process, you can make it in bulk quite easily and freeze it for later. That helps make the most of your time.

Let's get started 😊

Feeding Ratios:

Sourdough ratios are the amount of flour & water you use to feed your starter. Using ratios helps you scale the starter amount up or down, adjust the hydration & the amount of time it takes for your starter to reach peak. The more flour & water to starter the longer it will take to reach peak.

Using equal parts of flour & water means the starter is 100% hydration. The starter will only double the weight of the flour & water mixture once at peak because the starter culture will consume the food & lose some of the weight.

-Examples of RATIOS for 100g at peak-

- 1:1:1 ratio-50g starter/ 50g flour/ 50g water
- 1:2:2 ratio-25g starter/ 50g flour/ 50g water
- 1:3:3 ratio-17g starter/ 50g flour/ 50g water

And so forth!

There is also a free online starter calculator tool that will figure this for you: Google "Starter Calculator" Foodgeek<https://foodgeek.dk> > starter-calcu...Starter Calculator

Whichever feeding ratio you choose, the rule of thumb is always have equal parts of water and flour, and to not have more starter than flour & water in your ratio.

What does "peak" mean?

A starter that is at "peak" occurs after you have fed your starter flour and water and it has had time to ferment on the new "food" resulting in it doubling in size, bubbly, and smells like bread or sweet flour.

How to Feed your starter:

Prep: Get your scale, turn it on, set it to grams, set your clean jar on top of your scale and zero it out.

There are different ratios people use to feed their starter. There are no "right or wrong"

methods. It really depends on how quickly you want your starter to get to peak, what hydration you are looking for, and how your starter responds. I started with and often use 1:1:1 ratio: equal parts of starter, flour, water. Example: 50 grams starter, 50g flour, 50g water in your mason jar. This ratio maintains a balanced environment for your starter, encouraging steady growth and activity, and is great for maintenance and keeping your starter strong & active! The beauty is that you can change your feeding ratio. When I bake in bulk, I often switch to a higher feeding ratio such as 1:5:5. This higher feeding ratio with five times the amount of flour and water compared to the starter is perfect for reviving a sluggish starter or building a large batch for baking. The larger the feeding ratio, the longer it takes for the starter to feed on the flour/water to get to peak. The important part you're looking for after you stir your feeding ratios together, you want it to be a thick pancake batter consistency — not too stiff and not too runny either.

After stirring together: if storing on the counter, just cover loosely with the lid (no ring). Allow to sit until doubled in volume. If you are not using for baking, feed about 24 hours after last feeding or place in the fridge. (I usually feed every 24 hours if stored on counter)

Maintaining A Sourdough Starter:

Maintenance is fairly simple. Like anything living, it requires food and water. The location you keep your starter in will determine how you maintain it.

Leaving it out on the counter, it will need to be fed equal parts water and flour every 12-24 hours. Warmer homes or frequent baking will require more frequent feeding (around every 12 hours), while colder homes every 24 hours.

Storing your sourdough starter in the fridge will require feeding around once a week. It can, however, be stored up to two months in the fridge without being fed. Reviving a sourdough starter that has been stored in the fridge for a longer period of time is a good idea. This can be done by feeding it equal parts flour and water, allowing it to sit at room temperature for 12 hours, and then feeding it again.

It may need to be fed 2-3 times for 12 hours between each feeding before it becomes active enough to make certain recipes like bread. Some no-wait recipes you may be able to use sooner.

Pour off any hooch (excess liquid on top if there is any) before feeding.

How Often Should I Feed my Sourdough Starter?

That totally depends on how often you are going to use it.

Say you are going to use your starter to make pancakes every morning, or English muffins or French toast. You can leave your starter out on your counter and just feed it every 12-24 hours.

To illustrate, say that it is Monday, and on Tuesday, I want to make pancakes. I will pull my sourdough starter out of the fridge on Monday and feed it flour and water, mix it up, and leave it on the counter with a tea towel or loose lid covering it until Tuesday morning.

Once I am done making pancakes on Tuesday, and if I am not planning on using my sourdough starter until the next week, I will feed it and leave it on the counter for 4-8 hours, then cover the jar airtight with the ring and lid and put it in the refrigerator until next week.

However, let's say that I am planning on using my sourdough starter again on Wednesday to make cinnamon rolls, then I will just feed the sourdough starter and leave it on the counter until Wednesday.

When you leave sourdough on the counter at room temperature, the yeast will again be nice and active, and it will become bubbly sourdough starter.

Feeding a sourdough starter and using the refrigerator:

When you put your starter in the refrigerator, it puts the starter on pause, so you do not have to feed it as often because the yeast will relax, and they do not need much sustenance. You can kind of think of it like a bear hibernating in the winter.

When the sourdough starter is in the fridge, it does not need to be fed as much as it does when it is on the counter. On the counter, it needs to be fed daily, but in the fridge, it only needs to be fed about once a week.

You can even switch back and forth between the refrigerator and the counter if you use it sporadically.

If you use the starter every day, leave it on the counter. When not using it for two weeks, leave it in the refrigerator.

A good idea is to feed it every time you use it, leave it on the counter for 4-8 hours, and then put it back into the fridge until you are ready to use it again.

Common Questions:

How long before I intend to use it do I need to take it out of the fridge?

Typically, the suggestion is to wait at least 4 hours. But this also depends on what you are making. If you are following a sourdough recipe, usually the author should tell you exactly when to do so.

Should you bake sourdough straight from the fridge?

This will depend on the type of recipe. Many no-wait recipes that call for discard will have no problem at all using a starter straight from the fridge.

But for other recipes, like bread, for best results I suggest taking it out of the fridge, go through a couple of feedings, and allowing it to be nice and active before using.

How do you store your sourdough starter?

When you are feeding your starter, you will leave it out on the counter where it can get a little bit of air, so you might loosely cover it with a thin tea towel or the lid to your mason jar (without the ring), or something else that is not air tight. Let your fed starter sit on the counter for a few hours before putting it back in the fridge.

*However, when it goes in the refrigerator, you are going to want to use something airtight. I personally seal it in my jar with the ring around it.

How much starter should I keep as my baseline on hand?

You never want to use all of your starter in a recipe, I try not going below 30 grams. Reserve a 1/2 cup or so to have on hand at all times.

What does “fed” sourdough starter mean when your recipes call for it?

What I mean by that is your sourdough starter has had flour and water and the opportunity to sit out and feed on that.

If you are going to feed your starter, let's say it is out of the fridge, you give it flour and water and stir it up really well. You do not want to instantly put it back in the fridge, even if you are not planning to use it.

You want to let the starter sit out for a few hours to feed on the food you gave it and be active for a little bit. Then cover it and put it back into the refrigerator.

My starter taste really sour. How can I make it so that it does not taste as sour?

Your starter may have a little bit of a smell if it hasn't been fed in a while, or has been in the fridge for a long time, and your cooking projects will taste a more sour.

If you want to avoid the super sour sourdough taste, you might just need to feed it more

often, not let it sit out on the counter as long, and use your starter at “peak”. It’s more of a timing issue.

Smell your starter to make sure it doesn’t smell like vinegar if you are trying to avoid an overly sour sourdough taste. Ideally it should smell kind of like bread or sweet flour.

What do I do with extra starter? The world of Discard!

If you have starter leftover from a previous feeding, you don’t have to throw it away! You can use it in many wonderful recipes called “discard recipes” which are recipes that use inactive or extra starter! This includes crackers, muffins, pancakes, cookies, pizza dough, tortillas, and so much more! If you don’t want to use your discard right away, just put it in a new mason jar, seal it tight with the ring, label it “discard jar” with the date, and keep it in the fridge for discard recipes for up to a week or so. Just remember the longer it’s in the fridge the more sour the taste will be since it’s unfed. I keep my jar of discard in my fridge for a couple of months, not for recipes, but to always have the ability to revive a part of it as a backup starter if I need to. Every month or so I’ll throw away the older discard and start collecting fresh leftovers.

Note: your starter is more resilient than you might think! Truth be told, it’s very difficult to kill an established starter. Unless your starter has mold on it, you won’t ever have to throw it away, it can be revived and made stronger!

If any of the instructions are unclear, or if you have any questions, please let me know! I’m happy to help troubleshoot any questions that may arise. Sometimes talking about it over the phone can be helpful, so I will attach my phone number: 518-832-3340.

(Please don’t hesitate to reach out about anything, I enjoy talking about sourdough and could do so all day!)

Happy Sourdough!!

