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Sourdough Recipes

Experimenting with sourdough is a fascinating adventure with endless possibility. I like to push sourdough to its upper limits when adapting recipes to capture its many health benefits and the moist texture, body, and staying power that it gives baked goods. I also like its sour goodness and the way it satisfies. The first recipe for cornbread is my own, and the remaining ones are from Sara Pitzer's *Baking with Sourdough*. Pitzer's book offers a variety of baked goods recipes using different amounts of sourdough. The variety of recipes below will give you a sense of how much sourdough to add to your own favorite recipes.

I hope these recipes give you an idea of how to use sourdough—

- First, in terms of the proportions of sourdough to use depending on what type of baked good you are making;
- Second, the time that sourdough needs to rest at room temperature to be activated before being added to ingredients; and
- Third, the time that sourdough and ingredients need to rest on the counter top before baking.

Most sourdough baked goods taste better cold than they do right from the oven. Sourdough baked goods have a long shelf life. They can be baked ahead on weekends to be used in lunch boxes and snacks throughout the week and develop flavor with time. Sourdough is an especially welcome addition to cornbread, keeping it moist and improving its texture. Sourdough also especially enhances recipes that include maple, banana, and chocolate.

Sourdough Cornbread

1 cup stone-ground cornmeal
1 cup stone-ground spelt flour, or other flour of your choice
2 cups sourdough starter
1 teaspoon baking powder
¼ cup oil of your choice
¼ cup maple syrup
½ t. salt
1 egg, lightly beaten (optional)

Combine dry ingredients. Mix wet ingredients. Combine wet and dry ingredients. Bake in a 375° oven for 20-30 minutes.

If you choose to presoak the cornmeal and flour with the sourdough, mix these and let them stand overnight. Then add the baking powder, salt, and wet ingredients just before baking.

Sourdough Banana Bread

1 ½ cups sourdough starter
1 cup sugar
1 t. baking soda
1 t. salt
1/3 cup butter
1 beaten egg
1 cup unbleached flour (or whole wheat pastry flour)
1 cup very ripe banana
½ cup chopped nuts

Bring the starter to room temperature in a large bowl. When it has begun to bubble, add the sugar, soda and salt to it. Melt and cool the butter and add it, along with the egg, flour and banana, stirring in each ingredient in the order given. When everything is well mixed, stir in the nuts. Pour the batter into a greased loaf pan large enough so that it is no more than two-thirds full. Allow to stand in a warm place for about 20 minutes, then bake in a preheated 350 degree F oven for at least an hour, or until the loaf tests done when poked with a toothpick. You may lay a piece of brown paper or aluminum foil loosely over the top of the loaf if it is getting too brown. Do not under bake; it will be quite moist even when fully done. Allow it to cool in the pan for about 15 minutes before taking it out. Then allow the loaf to cool completely before slicing. This banana bread will be even better the second day if you have stored it wrapped in foil or plastic wrap.

For the lunchbox: sandwiches made of banana bread spread with a filling of cream cheese and chopped dates.

Sourdough Skillet Biscuits

2 cups sourdough starter
2 cups all-purpose unbleached white flour (or whole wheat pastry flour)
1 t. sugar
1 T. baking powder
½ t. salt

Let the starter come to room temperature in a large bowl. It won't hurt the starter to stand for a couple hours. About an hour before you want to serve the biscuits, sift the dry ingredients together into the starter bowl and mix to make a firm dough. Pinch off pieces of the dough and gently shape into balls about the size of large walnuts or small eggs. Arrange them in a well-greased 12-inch iron skillet and place in a warm place for 15-20 minutes, or long enough for the biscuits to show signs of rising. Because the baking powder reacts quickly with the sourdough starter, this happens fast. Bake in a preheated 400 F degree oven for about 30 minutes, or until well browned and crusty. Serve hot.

Sourdough Brown Biscuits

2 cups sourdough starter
1 T. honey
½ t. salt
2 T. oil
2 t. baking powder
1 ½ cups whole wheat flour

Put the 2 cups of starter into a large bowl, cover loosely and allow to sit for at least 10 hours in a warm place. When ready to bake, mix honey, salt and oil into the starter. Sift in the baking powder and whole wheat flour. For finest texture, discard any bran which remains in the sifter,, but for a heartier biscuit dump the bran right into the mixing bowl with the other ingredients. Mix everything well, but do not over beat.

Knead the dough gently until it holds together, then roll it out to a thickness of ½ to 1 inch, depending on whether you want thick crusty biscuits or high, lighter ones. Cut the biscuits out with a cutter or a small can from which both ends have been removed. On a greased cookie sheet, place them close together for soft biscuits or leave them farther apart for more crust.

Cover the biscuits with a dry, lightweight cloth and put them in a warm place for about half an hour, or until you see definite signs of rising. Then bake in a preheated 400 F degree oven for about 20 minutes. Break open one biscuit to be sure they are cooked through. They are ideal served with creamed chipped beef.

Sourdough Pancakes/Waffles

½ cup sourdough starter
1 cup undiluted evaporated milk
1 ¾ cups unbleached white flour (or whole wheat pastry flour)
1 cup water
2 eggs
2 T. sugar
½ t. salt
1 t. baking soda

Combine the first 4 ingredients in a large bowl, cover loosely and allow to stand in a warm place overnight, or for at least 8 hours. Beat together the eggs, sugar, salt, and soda, and stir into the starter combination with a wooden spoon. At this point, don't beat. Bake the pancakes on a lightly greased griddle, turning when bubbles appear. These pancakes are quite fat and fluffy and very tender because of the reaction of the soda with the sourdough. If you want them to be thinner, stir in a little more water as you are adding the egg mixture.

To make sourdough waffles, stir in 2-3 tablespoons of melted butter or cooking oil after all the other ingredients have been added. Bake on a lightly greased waffle iron. The fat added to the batter should help prevent the waffles from sticking provided the iron has been well seasoned.

Sourdough Buckwheat Pancakes

½ cup sourdough starter
1 cup unbleached white flour
1 cup buckwheat flour
2 cups warm water
2 eggs, beaten
2 T. sugar
½ t. salt
½ t. baking powder
3 T. melted butter
½ t. baking soda dissolved in 1 T. water

Mix together first 4 ingredients in a large bowl. Beat well. Cover loosely and allow to stand overnight or for at least 8 hours in a warm place. When ready to bake the pancakes, stir in the beaten eggs, sugar, salt, baking powder and melted butter. Finally, stir in the baking soda dissolved in water. Do not stir again after adding the soda. Bake on a moderately hot griddle, taking care not to let the buckwheat burn.

For darker pancakes with a truly old-time taste, allow the batter to age longer than 8 hours and substitute molasses for the 2 tablespoons of sugar.

Blueberry Breakfast Bread

1 cup sourdough starter
¼ cup soft shortening
¾ cup sugar
1 egg
½ cup milk
1 cup unbleached white flour
½ teaspoon baking soda
½ t. Salt
1 cup blueberries

Bring the starter to room temperature in a large bowl. In another bowl, cream the shortening and sugar together and then beat in the egg and milk. Turn this mixture into the bowl with the sourdough starter and sift in the flour, salt and soda. Mix very well. Gently fold in the blueberries. Pour the batter into a well-greased 8-inch square pan and allow to sit in a warmer place for at least 20 minutes.

Bake in a preheated 375 F degree preheated oven for 45-50 minutes. Do not under bake. Allow to cool completely so that it is not too sticky and gummy.

Molasses-Date Bars

1 cup sourdough starter
1 beaten egg
½ cup butter
¼ cup brown sugar
¼ cup dark molasses
½ t. salt
1 t. cinnamon
¼ t. baking soda
1 1/3 cups unbleached white flour
½ cup chopped dates
2 T. flour

In a large bowl allow the starter to warm up and become active. It should stand at room temperature for 1 to 2 hours. Then add the beaten egg, softened butter, brown sugar and molasses. Beat thoroughly with a wooden spoon. Next, put in the salt, cinnamon and soda. Sift in the flour. Beat the butter until it is lump-free.

Roll the chopped dates in the 2 T. flour or mix them with the flour in a bowl so that they do not stick together. Gently stir them into the batter. Pour the batter into a well-greased 9-inch pan and bake into a preheated 375 F degree oven for about 30 minutes or until the batter tests done when poked with a toothpick.

Allow to cool slightly before cutting into bars, then finish cooling on wire racks and sprinkle with powdered sugar before serving. Like most sourdough products, these taste much better cold than they do while still warm from the oven.

Adding Starter to Your Favorite Recipes

An easy way to use starter without extra calculation is to add about ¼ cup to a recipe. You can add sourdough to just about any baked good for extra flavor and improved texture. If you choose to soak the flour and liquid ingredients overnight in order to both reduce phytates and lower the blood sugar impact, leave out any baking soda and mix it in right before baking. Unlike baking *soda*, baking *powder* can be included with the ingredients in an overnight soak. [Baking soda helps neutralize the sour flavor of sourdough, if this is something you prefer; other flavors will remain intact.]

Alternatively, if you plan to use a great amount of sourdough in one of your favorite recipes, calculate the amount of flour and water in the starter (e.g., a cup of starter contains ½ cup flour and ½ cup water) and reduce the flour and liquid ingredients in the recipe by the same amount.

Books on sourdough often contain conversion rules. I like to experiment on my own and go by feel. You may prefer to set guidelines, such as those offered by Sara Pitzer in *Baking with Sourdough*:

“To adapt a yeast recipe, begin with a small amount of starter, about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup for recipes using less than 6 cups of flour and about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup for recipes calling for more flour. Mix the starter with some of the flour and some of the liquid from the basic recipe you want to convert. Figure that $\frac{1}{2}$ cup starter has replaced $\frac{1}{4}$ cup flour and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water. In baking powder recipes figure the same way, but use up to a cup of starter even in recipes calling for only 2 or 3 cups of flour.

Allow the mixture of starter, flour and liquid—the sponge—to stand and bubble for 4 to 24 hours, depending on the sourness you want. With quick breads you can shorten the time so the mixture stands only until it is obviously active, as little as an hour if you are not trying for the sour taste. When ready to bake, proceed with the recipe, adjusting the amounts of flour and water according to the amount of starter you used. Add as much flour as necessary to get a dough you can knead or a batter (for quick breads) that seem about as thick as the recipe was before you adapted it to sourdough. Go through the normal kneading, rising, and shaping steps for yeast breads. For quick breads, pour the batter into the pan and allow to rest until it begins to rise.

Reading Resources:

Emily Buehler, *Bread Science*

Karel Kulp and Klaus Lorenz, *Handbook of Dough Fermentations*.

Sara Pitzer, *Baking with Sourdough*

Lisa Rayner, *Wild Bread*

Daniel Wing and Alan Scott, *The Bread Builders: Hearth Loaves and Masonry Ovens*

Ed and Jean Wood, *Classic Sourdoughs: A Home Baker's Handbook*

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