

6 Tips to Prevent “Sour” Sourdough

The most common complaint with sourdough foods is that the more choosy of our family members don't care for a sour flavor. Did you know that sourdough does not have to be sour?

These six tips will help you ensure that your sourdough baked goods are pleasantly tangy, rather than overly sour - or perhaps not sour at all!

1. Regular Feedings

A sourdough starter (the active mother culture) contains both wild yeasts and beneficial bacteria (called lactobacilli). Regular flour feedings keep the organisms fed and in balance. But missing a feeding gives the bacteria a leg up. You see, the yeasts run out of food when the simple sugars in flour are all consumed, and they start dying off. But the bacteria still have food to eat. They eat the expired yeasts, along with the yeasts' wastes, and continue to produce lactic acid, the main sour flavor. And so the starter gets more sour.

In our Sourdough eCourse, we recommend twice daily feedings - about once every 12 hours. However, if the temperatures are very warm, the organisms go through their food more quickly. So you might consider adding a third feeding to your routine! This will help the yeasts keep the upper hand at all times.

Just make sure you feed *after* the starter shows signs that it has consumed the sugars from the prior feeding; this includes the production of hooch (the liquid that rises to the surface), lots of bubbles, and/or collapse of the peak.

2. Lose the Hooch

Pour off the hooch - the acidic liquid the organisms produce after consuming the simple sugars in flours. This is where the sourness from the lactobacilli mainly resides. If fed regularly, your starter may not produce much hooch.

3. Shorter Rising Times

Let your sourdough foods rise for shorter times, rather than longer. Sourness develops over time. As the wild organisms consume the simple sugars in flour, they produce acids. The acids give the characteristic sour flavor. Less time = less sour.

4. Cooler Rising Location

Let your sourdough foods rise in a cooler location. The wild organisms that work on grains to optimize nutrition and digestion really go to town at warmer temperatures. When they feast, they produce those sour acids. So, slow them down by keeping them cooler.

5. Use More Starter (What?)

Use more starter in a recipe, not less. This sounds strange, but here's why it works. More starter will work more quickly to rise and prepare the dough for digestion, resulting in less time for the dough to become sour. If adjust a recipe to add more starter, you should lessen the amount of water or liquid.

6. Use Baking Soda

Ever heard the phrase “soda sweetens”? It's true! Many sourdough recipes call for baking soda. Not only does the baking soda react with the starter to give a good rise, but it sweetens the dough or batter by neutralizing some of the acidic taste.