

Easy Homemade Sourdough Bread Recipe from 1869

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If you're not used to baking homemade bread, making sourdough bread might sound a bit intimidating at first, but once you get used to it, this bread is really much easier than "regular" yeasted bread.

This easy homemade sourdough bread only needs to be kneaded once, and after that you can just put it in the same pan you're going to bake it in and let it rise overnight. Then, the next morning when it has risen, all you have to do is put it in the oven and you're done.

This sourdough bread recipe is also easier because sourdough yeast is much more flexible as far as time is concerned than store bought yeast is. You don't have to watch it as closely to monitor the rising time. Rather than planning your time around being there to check the dough and knead, and let it rise and knead again, etc. all you have to do is prepare the dough the day before and let it rise overnight. And if you're really busy and it rises a little bit longer than you had planned, it's not a big deal, and most of the time the bread will still turn out perfectly fine even if the dough is a bit over-risen.

First Things First

This bread recipe calls for homemade yeast. There were different variations of homemade yeast back in the 1800s when the recipe was written, but I chose to use a sourdough starter for my homemade yeast since I think it's the simplest to use and to maintain. In order to make this recipe, you'll need an established sourdough starter.

An Old-Fashioned Recipe

Once you've got your sourdough starter established, it's time to move on to the actual bread-making itself. This recipe is one I found in an old recipe pamphlet from 1869.

~ Original Recipe ~

"One coffee-cup flour; two coffee-cups Graham flour, one coffee cup warm water, half coffee cup yeast, a little molasses, a teaspoon of salt, half teaspoon soda dissolved in the water. Make as stiff as it can be stirred with a spoon. Let it rise over night, and bake about an hour in a moderate oven. This quantity makes one loaf."

~ Mrs. Winslow's Domestic Receipt Book for 1869 ~ Pg. 4

Modern Adaptation

Ingredients:

- 3 cups flour *
- 1 cup warm water **
- 1/2 cup sourdough starter
- 2 Tbs. molasses (or whole cane sugar)
- 1 tsp. salt
- (Optional: 1/2 tsp. baking soda)

* To be historically accurate, you can use two cups of whole wheat flour and one cup of all-purpose flour. To be really historically accurate, though, the best flour to use would be an heirloom flour like spelt or einkorn. Einkorn flour is the one that I've been using the most of lately to make my bread.

** If you use einkorn flour, reduce the amount of water to about 3/4 cup.

Directions:

1. In a large mixing bowl, combine flour and salt, stirring until combined.
2. Add sourdough starter, molasses, and warm water, stirring until combined. Unlike other bread recipes, the dough for this bread will feel wet and sticky rather than dry.
3. (Optional: If you do not want any sour flavor or tang in your finished loaf, add the 1/2 tsp. of baking soda and mix until well combined.)
4. Knead the wet dough for a minute or two. This part will be messy. I usually just keep the dough in the bowl to knead it to avoid extra mess on the counter.
5. Place dough into a greased 9×5 inch bread pan. Cover with a damp dish cloth or tea towel, with another dry towel over it and let rise for 12-24 hours. You want the dish towel touching the bread to stay damp because that will help to prevent the top of the dough from drying out and forming a crust, which could prevent the dough from rising as much. (I find it convenient to prepare my bread dough somewhere between afternoon and suppertime the day before and then let it bake the next morning while I'm having breakfast.)
6. Once it has risen, the dough should be light and fluffy and form an indentation when you press your finger into it. (If you have a glass bread pan, you can see little bubbles in the dough through the sides and bottom of the pan.)
7. Bake at 350 degrees for about 45-50 minutes or until bread is golden brown and sounds hollow when you tap on it.

Recipe Notes:

- The length of time the bread needs to rise may vary depending on the time of year and the temperature in your home. In warmer weather, it will take less time to rise than it will in cooler weather. (Mine usually takes about 14-16 hours to rise in the summer and about 18-20 hours to rise in the winter.)
- The water for this recipe should be warmer when you bake during the winter months and cooler for the summer months.
- True, authentic sourdough bread is usually made without the addition of baking soda. Many 19th century recipes call for the use of baking soda in yeasted breads and baked goods, though, as a way to neutralize the sour flavor and create a sweeter taste. Some sourdough starter strains are stronger than others, so depending on the region in which you live and on your individual preference, you can add or omit the baking soda as you choose.