

Sourdough Starter Tips

<http://www.ourheritageofhealth.com/tips-for-using-and-maintaining-a-sourdough-starter-part-2/>

Use All-Purpose Flour for Feeding

If your starter ever seems to develop a questionable “off” smell, it might be the flour you’re using to feed it. Rather than using a whole wheat flour, try using an organic, unbleached all-purpose flour instead. As an added bonus, you won’t have to use up all of your good (and more expensive) whole grain flours for feeding. (And if you’re the kind of person who likes to grind your own grains this will save a *lot* of time and effort!)

Keep Your Starter Out in the Open

Sourdough starters need air to stay alive, so it’s best to keep your starter out on the counter of your kitchen or somewhere else where the air can circulate around it. If you close it up in a cupboard, it will be a lot less active, and it could even die completely. Another reason to keep it out in the open is that you’ll see it more often and have a better chance of actually remembering to feed it.

What to Do if Your Sourdough is too Sour:

Depending on where you live, the climate and time of year, etc. you might find that your sourdough comes out a little more tangy and sour than you would like.

One way to mellow out that sour taste a bit is to shorten the rising time of whatever you are baking. The longer the dough rises, the more sour tasting the final product tends to be. To get the full health benefits of sourdough, it’s best to let the dough ferment for longer, but if the sour flavor is too strong, you can experiment with shortening the rising time to get a flavor that is more agreeable.

Another way to mask the sour flavor a bit is to add baking soda to the dough or batter. This method is mentioned in many 19th century cookbooks, and most recipes of the period that call for yeast advise bakers to add soda or saleratus if the yeast is too sour.

From a health standpoint, it’s probably best to add the baking soda after the dough or batter has already fermented. I’m not a scientist, but since the sourdough creates an acidic environment that allows the dough to ferment (and reduces antinutrients like phytic acid), and since baking soda is alkaline, it seems like the baking soda would raise the pH of the dough, making it less acidic and negating some of the health benefits of sourdough baking. If you add the baking soda *after* the dough or batter has already fermented, though, you can have the best of both worlds.

Adding baking soda after the fermentation time works best if you’re making something with a more liquid-like batter like pancakes or waffles because it’s much easier to stir in the baking soda completely so you don’t end up with bitter-tasting lumps of soda in the final product.

If you’re making a loaf of bread or rolls or something else that has a really stiff dough, though, the only way to really do this would be to add the baking soda before the dough rises. In that case, you might not end up with quite as much of a “true” sourdough (and some of the health benefits of sourdough could potentially be compromised too), but it’s a really effective way to neutralize the sourness if you have an occasion where it’s really important for your bread to taste sweet rather than sour.

Don’t Give Up if You Don’t Succeed!

If your first attempt at starting and maintaining a sourdough starter completely fails, don’t give up completely! My first sourdough starter died because I forgot to feed it enough, but my second starter has stayed a live and strong for several months now. Working with sourdough is quite a bit different than working with regular baker’s yeast, so it takes some time to get used to it, but once you figure out a system that works for you, it’s well worth it when you can pull a warm loaf of homemade sourdough bread out of the oven!