

Advanced Sourdough Starter Handbook

Making Your Starter From Scratch

Ingredients:

- You will need a total of 780g of **Whole Wheat flour**, preferably Organic
 - Freshly ground works best for this, but store-bought will still do the trick. My favorite brand of store-bought Whole Wheat flour is Bob's Red Mill, but as long as it is "unbleached" you shouldn't have any issues
- Water, room temperature-ish. Typically, whatever first comes out of the tap on "cold" works since the pipes tend to normalize to room temperature if you haven't used the sink for a little while. So long as the water isn't "very cold" or "hot", you'll be fine.

Equipment:

- 16oz+ straight sided vessel with a loosely fitting lid, preferably glass
- A digital scale that measures in grams
- Something to stir and scrape your vessel with (offset spatula, silicone spatula, knife, etc.)

Optional, but useful:

- [A set of food storage containers](#)
 - You'll need 100g of flour every day for 7 days. So you can pre-measure your flour with these and then just grab one when you need it
- [A jar designed for sourdough starter](#)
- Blue painter's tape (for labeling your containers)
- A rubber band to mark the height of your starter

Directions:

This whole process should take about 7-days. Possibly up to 10 if you are in a particularly cold environment. Once you get to day 8 the directions will be the exact same for every day going forward.

Once each day you will be "discarding" (ie. pouring out) most of what is in your container. We use the weight of your container to tell how much of the previous day's starter is left in your container.

So if your container weighs 400g when you first measured it, you know whatever weight your scales says, minus 400g, is how much starter is in the jar.

$$\text{Current Weight} - \text{Original Jar Weight} = \text{Starter weight}$$

Once you have a nice, active, healthy starter you can actually fry up this “discard” like a savory pancake. Until then, it will just go straight into the compost or trash.

Record the weight of your Starter jar, without the lid, here: _____g
(it’s also helpful to place a piece of tape on your container and write down the weight there. Just remember to put the tape on *before* you weight the container)

Taking care of a starter every day is called “feeding” it. Each day the pattern will look like this:

1. Pour out most of your starter
2. Add flour and water
3. Stir
4. Check the box for that day to keep track of where you are in the process

Day 1

Ingredients:

- 100g Whole Wheat flour, unbleached
- 150g room temperature water

Directions:

1. Simply mix your ingredients until there are no more dry pockets of flour and place the lid loosely on top (you’ll be placing the lid loosely on top *every* day, so I won’t call that out in future steps)
2. Optional: place a rubber band around your vessel at the same height as the internal contents. This will make it easier to see the rise and fall cycle of your starter going forward.

Day 2

Notes:

You may already be seeing some “activity” (ie. little bubbles forming in your starter). The texture of your starter may also be a bit “snotty” with lots of water at the top of the jar at this stage. That is normal.

Ingredients:

- 70g starter (jar weight + 70g = what your jar should weight after discarding most of your starter)

- 100g Whole Wheat flour, unbleached
- 115g room temperature water

Directions:

1. Pour out most of your starter until your scale reads your original jar weight + 70g. Do this into a separate vessel, rather than the trash, just in case you need to pour some starter back in to get to the +70g number.
2. Add flour and water and stir until there are no more dry pockets of flour.

Day 3

Notes:

Your starter will likely look very “active”, with lots of bubbles creating rise in the jar before you feed it. It will start smelling slightly “sweet” and maybe even a little bit “off” or “rotten”. This is totally normal and a sign your starter is doing what it is supposed to do. This “off” smell will only last for 1-2 days and then it will never smell like that again.

Ingredients:

- 70g starter
- 100g Whole Wheat flour, unbleached
- 115g room temperature water

Directions:

1. (Same as Day 2) Pour out most of your starter until your scale reads your original jar weight + 70g. Do this into a separate vessel, rather than the trash, just in case you need to pour some starter back in to get to the +70g number.
2. Add flour and water and stir until there are no more dry pockets of flour.

Day 4

Notes:

It will look very “active” and probably “soupy”. Probably smells very acidic or “vomity” (that’s the acid you’re smelling). You’re on the right track! This is the worst it will ever smell and it will start to get better tomorrow.

If you are *not* smelling anything other than “wet flour” there is either something wrong with your flour or your water. Make sure you are using Whole Wheat *unbleached* flour. If you bought it a “long time ago”, you may need to buy new flour. If the flour is relatively new (purchased in the last few months) and it’s unbleached, then the problem is likely your water. It’s possible the chlorine content of your local tap water is too high and killing off the bacteria we are trying to cultivate. You can purchase a jug of “distilled”, “natural”, or “filtered” water from any local grocery store for very cheap and use this as your water going forward.

Rare, but possible: If your kitchen is on the chillier side (less than 65F), you may also just be experiencing slower progress. The colder the environment, the less active the bacteria, and the less active the bacteria, the longer creating a starter will take. I rarely see this as being the actual problem though, and the solution is simply to continue the feeding schedule for a couple extra days.

Ingredients:

- 70g starter
- 100g Whole Wheat flour, unbleached
- 100g room temperature water

Directions:

1. Same as previous days. Pour out the excess starter, mix in the flour and water

Day 5

Notes:

Your starter will still smell acidic, but less so than yesterday. It's likely to be very active today and may even slightly overflow out of your jar if you are using a 16oz vessel.

Ingredients:

- 70g starter
- 100g Whole Wheat flour, unbleached
- 100g room temperature water

Directions:

1. Same as previous days. Pour out the excess starter, mix in the flour and water

Day 6

Notes:

Your starter may look a little less “active” than on previous days. It's also going to start smelling more “sweet”. Almost like sourcream. It might still smell slightly acidic right before you feed it, which is normal and will continue to decrease over time. You'll start to notice a “sour” smell more than an “acidic” smell going forward.

Ingredients:

- 50g starter
- 100g Whole Wheat flour, unbleached
- 100g room temperature water

Directions:

1. Same as previous days. Pour out the excess starter, mix in the flour and water

Day 7

Notes:

12 or so hours after the last feeding you'll notice your starter is beginning to smell slightly "sweet" or even "milky", similar to sour cream. Right before your feeding today the smell may become more "neutral" and you'll notice the starter is moderately bubbly and "healthy"

Ingredients:

- 25g starter
- 100g Whole Wheat flour, unbleached
- 100g room temperature water

Directions:

1. Same as previous days. Pour out the excess starter, mix in the flour and water

Day 8 (this is what you will do every day going forward)

Notes:

Congratulations! You now have an active, healthy, starter you can use to start making sourdough *today!* You should be seeing a consistent rise and fall cycle to your starter in a roughly 24-hour period. It should smell slightly "sour" and not at all "acidic" with lots of little bubbles you can see through the side of your vessel. If that is not the case, simply follow the directions for today for an additional 2 days.

Ingredients: (this is the same feeding you will use from now to to maintain your starter)

- 10g starter
- 80g Whole Wheat flour, unbleached
- 80g room temperature water

Directions

1. With such little starter compared to previous days (10g vs 50-70g), it's easier to measure the 10g into another container or the lid of your jar, discard everything else in the jar, and then add the 10g back into the jar along with the fresh flour and water
2. Stir until there are no more clumps of dry flour.

Lazy Baker Wild Yeast Tamer

How To Share Your Starter

1. While feeding your starter, set aside 10-15g of your discard in a sealed container.
2. Give this discard to your friend and have them feed it as soon as possible, following the same 10/80/80 ratio you use every day.

Keep the discard chilled if it will be more than a couple hours before they can feed it.

If the discard you gave them is coming from your very active starter, they can start baking with it after their first feeding cycle (within 24hrs)

How To Make A Backup

Whether it's peace of mind, taking a long break from baking, or wanting something you can easily ship to a friend, making a long-term backup of your starter is both smart and incredibly easy. This is best done when you are doing your daily Starter feeding. Make sure your oven is *cold* and has not been used recently.

1. Line a baking tray with a silicone baking sheet.
2. Evenly spread your fresh discard over the top of the silicone baking sheet, getting it as thin and even as possible.
3. Place the baking sheet in your oven and turn on just the oven light (no heat!). Close the oven door and leave to dry overnight or a minimum of 8 hours. The discard will become dry flakes that easily snap. If they *bend*, instead of *snap*, they are not yet done. Throw it in the oven for a few more hours.
4. Once your discard is completely dry and easily snaps, break it up into smaller pieces and store in an airtight container. These flakes can be used to create a new starter and will last anywhere from 6-months to even a few years.

To make a new starter with these flakes, simply follow the standard daily feeding instructions, replacing the 10g of active starter with 10g of dried discard. You should have an active starter ready for baking in 3-4 days and completely skip the “smelly steps” of days 3-5 when making a starter from scratch.

How to store your starter

If you are not planning to bake on a regular basis you can easily store your starter for safe keeping in the fridge. Perfect for vacations, weekend trips, or when you just want a break from baking and feeding your starter

1. Feed your starter just like you normally would. Let it sit on the counter for roughly 1 hour, and then place the whole thing into the fridge.

2. Once every 2-weeks take your starter out of the fridge and give it a regular feeding. Leaving it out on the counter for roughly 1 hour before placing it back in the fridge.

If you forget to feed your starter for several weeks, or even several months, it will likely bounce right back with just a couple days of regular feeding. Then you can place it back in the fridge for long term storage

What do I do with all this excess discard??

You actually have several options for what to do with your discard. It does not need to go to waste

1. You can keep an extra vessel in your fridge just for excess starter. The bacteria becomes much less active in the fridge and gains more time to eat any remaining food in the discard. This discard can then be used in recipes to add a sourdough flavor (pancakes, waffles, muffins, etc.), if it is less than 2-weeks old it can be used as the Starter in your sourdough recipe and even allow you to keep the Leaven Stage, or you can cook up some Sourdough Discard Pancakes (see the “Convert Any Recipe To Sourdough bonus for examples of how to do this)
2. You can cook up Discard Pancakes (see the “Convert Any Recipe To Sourdough bonus for examples of how to do this)
3. Share it with friends so they can have their own starter
4. Dry it out and keep it as a backup (see above for “How To Make A Backup”)
5. You can add it to your compost. This active bacteria is great at breaking down foods and very nutritious. So adding it to your compost will give the whole ecosystem a boost!
6. You can toss it. Realistically, it's just flour and water. Don't feel compelled or pressured to do anything with it. You're allowed

Has My Starter Gone Bad?

Short answer, probably not. Even a starter neglected for a very long time will bounce back with some regular feedings. It may not be as robust as you last left it, but given time it will get back to its old quality. The *only* time a starter is a lost cause is when you see mold in your container, which can be blue, black, green, and even pink. The top of your starter looking a little dark with some excess liquid is *not* mold.