

Turkestan is part of the former Soviet Union, adjoining Iran and Afghanistan, and since Biblical times has been the home of the nomadic Turkmen tribes. Their favourite bread is bursting with toasted seeds and nuts and has travelled with them wherever they have settled. I've added bakers' yeast to the traditional sourdough starter to improve the texture of the baked loaf. Good with soup and salads.

## turkestan loaf

Mix the flour, salt, seeds, cracked rye and wheat and the spelt or wheat flakes in a large bowl. Make a well in the centre.

Crumble the yeast into a small bowl, add the honey and half the water and stir until dispersed. Pour into the well, along with the rest of the water and the sourdough starter. Stir the liquids together, then gradually draw in the dry ingredients to make a soft but not sticky dough. If the dough sticks to your fingers, work in a little more flour, 1 tablespoon at a time: if it feels hard and dry, work in a bit more water, 1 tablespoon at a time – the amount of liquid needed will depend on the thickness of the starter.

Turn out the dough onto a lightly floured work surface and knead thoroughly for 10 minutes. Return the dough to the bowl, then put the bowl into a large plastic bag or cover with clingfilm. Leave in a warm place to rise until doubled in size, about 2 hours.

Turn out the risen dough onto a lightly floured work surface and gradually work in the nuts. Shape the dough into a ball and set on the baking sheet. Cover and let rise as before until the dough has doubled in size, about 1 hour.

Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 220°C (425°F) Gas 7.

Uncover the risen loaf, transfer the baking sheet to the preheated oven and bake for about 35 minutes or until the loaf sounds hollow when tapped underneath. Cool on a wire rack.

Best eaten within 4 days or toasted. Can be frozen for up to 1 month.

500 g organic stoneground spelt or wholemeal flour  
2 teaspoons sea salt  
2 tablespoons sunflower seeds  
2 tablespoons sesame seeds  
1 tablespoon linseeds  
1 tablespoon pumpkin seeds  
30 g cracked rye  
30 g cracked wheat  
30 g spelt or wheat flakes  
15 g fresh yeast\*  
1 tablespoon honey  
275 ml tepid water  
200 g sourdough starter (page 13)  
50 g toasted walnut halves, coarsely chopped  
50 g toasted almonds, coarsely chopped  
50 g toasted hazelnuts, coarsely chopped

*a baking sheet, greased*

**makes 1 large loaf**

*\* To use easy-blend dried yeast in place of the fresh yeast and sourdough starter, mix 1½ sachets (7 g each) with the flour and salt. Mix in the seeds, cracked wheat and rye, and the wheat flakes. Make a well in the centre, add the honey and the tepid water, then continue as in the main recipe.*

# Sourdough Bread Recipes



# california sourdough

There seem to be more recipes for California and San Francisco sourdough than there are bakers in the state. Before a loaf was shaped and baked, the original pioneers and settlers kept back a portion of dough to leaven the next batch. These days bakers use a range of leavens; saved dough starter, soupy sourdough leavens, fresh yeast, dried sourdough flavourings or bicarbonate of soda. The objective is a light-textured, mildly sour, well-risen white loaf. The authentic flavour comes from the foggy atmosphere and the water of the area, which are hard to reproduce, but this is a good approximation.

200 g sourdough starter  
(page 12)\*  
500 ml tepid water  
15 g fresh yeast\*\*  
900 g unbleached strong  
white bread flour  
2 teaspoons sea salt

2 baking sheets, greased

**makes 2 medium loaves**

*\* If you don't keep a sourdough starter, use a small piece of dough, about 150 g, saved from a previous batch of bread. Gradually work in enough tepid water to make a very soft dough, cover and leave for 8 hours at room temperature, then use 200 g for the starter for this recipe.*

*\*\* To use easy-blend dried yeast, mix one 7 g sachet with the flour and salt, then work it into the sourdough starter and water mixture.*

Put the starter and water into a large bowl and mix with your hand to make a soupy batter. Crumble the yeast and work it into the mixture. Mix the flour with the salt, then gradually beat into the liquid with your hand until well mixed. The dough should feel soft but not sticky: if it feels too slack, work in extra flour, 1 tablespoon at a time: if it feels hard or dry, or there are crumbs left in the bottom of the bowl, work in extra water, 1 tablespoon at a time.

Turn out onto a floured work surface and knead thoroughly to make a smooth, firm, very supple dough. Return the dough to the bowl and cover with clingfilm. For the best flavour, let rise slowly in a cool room until doubled in size, about 4 hours, or overnight in the refrigerator.

Turn out onto a lightly floured work surface and punch down to deflate (if dough has been stored in the refrigerator, let it come back to room temperature before continuing, 1½–2 hours).

Divide the dough into 2 equal pieces, cover with a sheet of clingfilm and let rest for 10 minutes. Shape each portion into a neat ball, handling the dough as little as possible. Put onto the prepared sheets, then slide into a large plastic bag, slightly inflate and close the end. Let rise at normal room temperature until almost doubled in size, about 2 hours.

Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 220°C (425°F) Gas 7. Put a roasting tin of water into the oven to heat: the steam created will help develop a good crust.

Uncover the loaves and quickly slash the top in a diamond pattern using a small serrated knife or a razor blade. Put into the heated, steamy oven and bake for 30 minutes or until the loaves sound hollow when tapped underneath.

Cool on a wire rack and eat within 5 days or toast. Can be frozen for up to 1 month.

Pinch the seam to seal in the filling, then gently roll the dough with your hands to make a sausage about 60 cm long.

Carefully lift the dough onto the prepared baking sheet and shape into a ring joining the ends. Slip the sheet into a large plastic bag, slightly inflate, then let rise in a warm spot until doubled in size. About 2 hours.

Meanwhile, preheat the oven to its maximum setting, and put a roasting tin of water in the bottom to create a steamy atmosphere.

Uncover the ring and slash lightly with a sharp knife or razor blade. Put into the hot oven and spray water if possible to increase the steam.

Bake until the loaf is a good brown, very crisp, and sounds hollow when tapped underneath. 8–15 minutes depending on your oven.

Cool on a wire rack.

Eat warm within 24 hours. The cooked loaf can be frozen for up to one month.

## olive and thyme bread

Eat this bread warm, with the best virgin olive oil and balsamic vinegar you can afford for dipping, some wine for sipping. A very relaxed way to start a meal.

This is also a good bread for serving antipasti or for mopping up delicious salad dressings. I developed this recipe after seeing beautiful similar loaves in bakeries in the South of France. Basically I wanted a bread stuffed with plump, black olives (choose the plumpest richest olives you can. The whole point of this loaf is the high proportion of crust to crumb, just make for snacking - perfect with a glass of wine on a fine summer evening in the garden before dinner.

200 g unbleached  
strong white bread flour

Put the flours and salt in a bowl and mix.

30 g fine wholemeal  
plain flour

Make a well in the centre and add the starter and water.

1 teaspoon sea salt

Work the starter and water together to make a soupy mixture, then gradually work in the flour to make a slightly soft dough. Depending on the consistency of the starter, you may need to work in a little extra white flour or water.

100 g sourdough starter

about 150 ml tepid  
water

Turn out onto a lightly floured work surface and knead for 10 minutes until very pliable and smooth.

100 g pitted olives

2 teaspoons fresh  
thyme leaves, stripped  
from the stalks

Return the dough to the bowl, cover with cling film and let rise in a warm spot until doubled in size, and three hours depending on the vigour of the starter.

a baking sheet,  
greased

Punch down the risen dough a couple of times to deflate, or turn it out onto a slightly floured work surface before punching down.

**makes 1 medium loaf**

Using your knuckles, gently pat the dough into a narrow rectangle about 40 cm long. Sprinkle the olives and thyme down the middle of the dough. Fold over the sides to enclose the filling.

## pain de campagne

The large, crusty, chewy, well-flavoured loaf found in the best bakeries in France is made from a flour that retains a small proportion of bran to give an off-white colour. It's almost impossible to buy this flour other than from specialist wholesale millers, so I've added some wholemeal pastry flour to the white flour. Choose organic flour for the best results and use filtered tap water that's been boiled and cooled (or spring water) to avoid a chlorine taint. Feed the starter about 6 hours before starting the recipe to make sure it's vigorous.

450 g unbleached strong  
white bread flour

30 g fine plain wholemeal  
flour

1½ teaspoons sea salt

200 g soft dough  
sourdough starter  
(page 13)

about 325 ml tepid water

*a baking sheet or pizza  
baking stone*

**makes 1 large loaf**

Mix the flours and salt in a large bowl, then make a well in the centre. Spoon the starter into the well, then pour in the water. Mix the starter with the water to make a soupy batter, then gradually work in the flour to make a slightly soft dough. Depending on the consistency of the starter, you may need to work in a little extra flour or water, 1 tablespoon at a time.

Turn out onto a lightly floured work surface and knead thoroughly for 10 minutes until very smooth and elastic.

Return the dough to the bowl, cover with clingfilm and let rise in a warm place until doubled in size, about 2–6 hours depending on the vigour of your starter and the temperature. The dough can also be left to rise in a cool room or the refrigerator overnight.

Turn out the risen dough and punch down to deflate. Shape the dough into a rough ball and dust with flour. Set the dough in a linen-lined proving basket or a basket or colander lined with a well-floured linen tea towel. Slide the basket into a large plastic bag and inflate slightly. Let rise in a warm place until doubled in size, about 2–4 hours. The dough will take longer if it has been in the refrigerator.

Towards the end of the rising time, preheat the oven to 230°C (450°F) Gas 8. Put a heavy baking sheet or pizza stone into the oven to heat.

Uncover the loaf and turn out onto the hot sheet or stone, then quickly slash the top with a small sharp knife or blade. Put into the preheated oven – if you have a water spray or mister bottle, quickly spray the oven to create a burst of steam. Bake until the loaf turns a dark golden brown and sounds hollow when tapped underneath, about 30–35 minutes. Cool on a wire rack.

Best eaten within 5 days or toasted. Can be frozen for up to 1 month.

## german rye

This makes a traditional, deeply-favoured bread with close texture and good crust. It uses a sourdough starter rather than yeast and a high proportion of rye flour. For a milder, lighter loaf you could use equal quantities of rye and white flour. The flavour of this bread develops and matures after baking and it keeps particularly well.

600 g stoneground wholemeal rye flour

200 g unbleached strong white bread flour'

50 gout rye grains, plus extra for finishing

2 teaspoons sea salt

a good pinch of ground caraway seeds

350 ml thick batter sourdough starter

about 370 ml tepid water

2 baking sheets, greased

**Makes 2 loaves**

Put the flours, cut rye grains, salt and ground caraway seeds in large bowl, mix well, then make a well in the centre. In chilly weather gently warm the flour mixture in a low oven at 150°C (300°F) for a few minutes or microwave on HIGH for 15 seconds.

Tip the sourdough starter into the well. Add the water and stir until soupy. Using your hand, gradually work the flour into the liquid to make a soft dough. Flours and starters vary, so you may need to add more water, or if the dough feels very sticky, some more white flour. This dough will feel heavier and will stick to your fingers more than an all wheat dough; it will also be harder to work.

5 Turn out the dough onto a lightly floured work surface and knead energetically for about 10 minutes, Alternatively, use the dough hook of a free- standing mixer and work for 5 minutes on low speed.

Return the dough to the bowl, cover with cling film, then let rise until doubled in size. Rye flour needs plenty of encouragement, so a fairly warm humid atmosphere, like a steamy kitchen, works best. \* Depending on the vigour of your starter and the room temperature, the dough can take anything from about 3-8 hours to double in size. I leave it to rise on a rack over the cooker, usually overnight unless the weather is very hot.

Punch down the risen dough a couple of times to deflate, or turn it out onto a lightly floured work surface before punching it down.

Divide the dough into two equal pieces and shape each into a neat round.

Roll the loaves in the extra cut rye, then set on the prepared sheets.

Slip the sheets into a large plastic bag, inflate gently then fasten.

The shaped loaves can be risen in canvas lined proving baskets, or in wicker baskets or colanders with heavily floured tea towels. Let rise in a warm spot until doubled in size, about 3-5 hours, depending on the temperature and the vigour of your dough.

Towards the end of the rising time preheat the oven to 220°C (425°F) Gas 7. Put a roasting tin of water in the base of the oven to create steam.

If you have been proving the dough in a basket, put two unfloured baking sheets or a baking stone in the oven to heat. Uncover the risen dough or swiftly turn the loaves out of their baskets onto the hot sheets.

Slash the top of each loaf with a sharp knife or razor blade, then put into the preheated oven. If you have a water spray or mister, give the oven a good spray to add to the steamy atmosphere - this will help the dough rise in the oven (called ovenspring').  
12 Bake for about 35 minutes until the loaves sound hollow underneath when tapped.

Cool on a wire rack. For best flavor wrap and keep overnight before slicing.

The loaf will keep for up to a week and makes good toast. Freeze for up to one month.