

Sour Dough Rye Bread

What can be better than the smell of home baked bread filling the house?

I recently rediscovered baking my own bread again.

When I first came to this country 22 years ago from Germany I was desperate for decent bread. At that time I had a hard time finding any bread I would consider eating. Not even Borealis bread existed. The Market Basket sold chunks of a Canadian baked German bread that came in very long loaves. It was OK, but it never was fresh. The advice to put it in the fridge and it would last a week or more was appalling to me. In Germany bread gets baked in the early morning and by 5pm the baker can't really sell it any more.

A friend of mine had wisely given me a bread baking book for my travels, so I felt equipped to attempt baking my own bread. I felt nervous about trying sourdough and settled for whole wheat yeast bread. Of course all the flour I found was finely ground pastry flour- even whole wheat. I was looking for some rugged, hearty bread. Fortunately the owner of Nature's Choice offered to grind me coarser wheat flour.

This way I was set up for the next few years baking my own bread until there were acceptable breads available. (It is so much more convenient to buy, isn't it?)

Once discovering the Co-op I was delighted that there is a variety of breads available now. Meanwhile I hardly ever eat wheat bread anymore, so the choice becomes limited again. The packaged german rye bread is what I often settled for, but to be honest, in my family we would have this type of bread in the house as a last resort.

Still, I was content. To bake my own bread had not entered my mind in years. Just recently my partner was given a sour dough starter and baked a delicious rye bread. That made me remember my cookbook and I read up on sourdough. The next bread I baked and I was very pleased how it came out. All of a sudden I find myself experimenting with sourdough rye breads, pizza crust and rolls. The house smelling of rosemary or fennel and I can't wait for the next day to cut into it and see how it came out. This beats the "convenience" of buying the bread- besides, this bread is different than any other one I can buy.

I'll share the basic recipe with you and you can experiment from there.

German recipes are given by weight and this is the best conversion into cups I could do.

first part:

About 1/3 c starter

1 1/2 c water, luke warm

2 3/8c rye flour (2 1/2 is probably just fine)

second part:

2 1/2 c rye flour or can be mixed with other flour

2T salt

2T coriander

1T cumin

1t fennel

or any other spices

1/4 c water

First part, starter:

Find a friend to give you a sour dough starter, or give me a call, I happily share. I discovered once you have the sour dough starter it is actually easier to work with than the yeast.

In the first step you solve the starter in the luke warm water and add rye flour, making a pretty liquid mix. Cover with a towel and let sit either over night or for quite a few hour during the morning . If you start it in the evening you can bake around midday or if you start in the morning you can bake in the evening.

The starter should have risen and formed some bubbles on the surface. Remove 1/3 - 1/2 cup as starter for the next bread and store in a glass jar in the fridge. It will keep for a number of weeks.

Dough:

Now add rye flour, salt, spices and water and kneed into bread dough for 10 min. on a flat floured surface. You can use different flour in this step, but I would keep the starter rye flour.

There is an art to kneading the dough; finding the right rhythm and folding it always on the top, forming an even undisturbed area on the bottom, which at the end will form the top of the loaf. During the kneading I actually add a lot of flour until the dough has a nice consistency and doesn't stick to the board or the hands. On my last try I skipped the 1/4 c water(but it might have been just the type of day to make the starter rise a lot and stay especially moist).

Let the dough rest a few hours with the folded dough area on the bottom in a floured bowl.

Bread loaf

Once the dough has risen kneed it again on a floured surface at least 5 min. Even during this step I have to add quite a bit of flour.

Depending on what type of bread loaf you would like you can set the dough into a floured bread basket for the last rise or a buttered and floured baking pan.

If you use a bread basket - the inside of the basket will shape the top of the bread, so you place it with the folded side of the dough on the top. I don't have a nice basket, so I use a rectangular glass baking dish and place the folded area on the bottom. I decorate the top with a few cuts of a knife. If the bread rises fast, it will crack along these decorations. Seeds can be sprinkled on top.

Let the bread rest and rise another hour or more.

Baking:

Heat up the oven to 450° and place a dish with a little water in it.

Bake the bread about 15 min. at this temperature with the water. All the rising will happen during this time and establish the crust. Take out the water and turn the oven down to 350-380° and bake for another 50-60 min. When knocking on the bread it should sound hollow. The thickness of the crust depends on how long you bake the bread. The cookbook recommends a thickness of at least 1/8" or thicker. Using a baking dish you don't get the crust all around like you would get when you use the bread basket and then bake it as a round loaf on a sheet. During my early bread baking a friend used to tease me that one needed a chain saw to cut the bread. During my recent trails the crust has been firm, but not extremely hard; I think I used to bake the bread longer, and I had a bread basket. But the inside is always nicely done after

50 min., or 60 if I have a bigger loaf.

Enjoy the process of baking bread. It should be especially nice when the weather turns colder. A fun variation is to form smaller rolls and try out different spices or seeds in each one. You still heat up the oven to 450° and use water, for 15 min., but the additional baking time is only about 20 min.

Let me know how your bread came out.

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