

rustic table bread

RECIPE COURTESY OF BRYAN FORD

INGREDIENTS:

Levain

- 50 grams mature sourdough starter
- 150 grams bread flour
- 50 grams whole wheat flour
- 175 grams warm water

Bread Dough

- 720 grams water
- 700 grams bread flour
- 150 grams all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
- 100 grams whole wheat flour
- 50 grams rye flour
- 25 grams kosher salt
- Vegetable oil, for the bowl and loaf pan

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT:

- 2 9-by-5-by-3-inch loaf pans
- 2 proofing baskets (optional)
- 1 3-quart Dutch oven or cast-iron fryer with skillet lid

ACTIVE TIME:

1 hour

TOTAL TIME:

14 hours (includes proofing times)

EASE OF PREPARATION:

Intermediate

YIELD:

2 loaves

INSTRUCTIONS

Levain

1. Mix the starter, bread and whole wheat flours, and warm water in a medium bowl. Cover with plastic wrap and let this sit at room temperature. Since I incorporate a lot of mature starter into the mix, it is ready to use in 3 to 4 hours, when it is in its “young” stage.

Bread Dough

1. I recommend using up to 720 grams of water for a basic loaf of bread that is hand mixed. If you are new to baking, you can even use as little as 650 grams of water for the final mix amount. This will allow you to get comfortable handling dough and understanding fermentation. The more water you incorporate, the more possibility of a soupy mess you can get. So, the amount of water you want to use depends on your ambition or skill level. I will use a total of 720 grams of water, but I will start with only about 600 grams of water.
2. Add the bread, all-purpose, and whole wheat flours to a large bowl, then add the levain and 600 grams water. Use your hands to gently incorporate the water into the flour. Once it starts to come together and feels dry, let it rest for 5 minutes.
3. Proceed to slowly add the remaining 120 grams water, 50 grams at a time, mixing and letting it rest for 5 minutes after each addition, and saving 10 to 20 grams for when the salt is added (later). This might take a few rounds of adding. Don't rush it!
4. Once all your desired water is added and there is no dry flour, transfer to an oiled medium bowl or tub and let rest for 1 hour. It's wise to transfer from the bowl you mixed in because you will start to get dried up flour particles interfering with your folds later on.
5. After an hour has elapsed, add the salt and the last saved bit of water. Squeeze the water and salt into the dough, but don't tear at it. The water and salt will absorb with squeezing and gentle folding for 5 to 7 minutes. Trust the process and be patient, as at first it does not seem like the water will incorporate. Cover with plastic wrap or a clean kitchen towel and let that rest for 30 minutes.
6. After 30 minutes, perform a gentle “stretch and fold.” Stretch the dough up out of the bowl and fold it over itself, like an envelope. Rotate the bowl 4 times, repeating and making sure that every side has been folded over itself. Let it rest again for 30 minutes, then repeat the stretch and fold. You can also get away with no stretches if you aren't a perfectionist and just want to eat good bread.
7. Depending on your ambient temperature, your dough may need 2 to 3 more hours to finish its first fermentation. Signs to look for are a smooth surface, bubbles, elasticity when you pull at the top, and a slight web-like structure at the bottom when you turn out the dough onto the table.
8. Once you're ready to shape, lightly grease two 9-by-5-by-3-inch loaf pans with vegetable oil or flour 2 proofing baskets to make boules (see Cook's Note) — or use one of each, as here.

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YIELD:

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9. Turn out your dough onto a very lightly floured work surface. Divide the dough in half. Working with half of the dough, stretch the dough to fold it over itself, rotating it a few times, until it is smooth on one side (shaping into a cylinder for a loaf or round ball for a boule). With the seam-side of the dough firmly on your surface, gently pull the ball toward you, creating tension in the dough and smoothness on the bottom and top. Transfer the doughs to their prepared proofing vessels. Either place the loaves seam-side down—so that when you invert it into your baking vessel it will be seam-side up—or place them seam-side up and score the top before baking.

10. Proof in the loaf tins and/or proofing baskets for about 30 minutes, then cover each with a plastic bag or plastic wrap and put into your fridge overnight (8 to 12 hours).

11. The next day, preheat a 3-quart Dutch oven or cast-iron fryer with skillet lid (if using) in the oven at 500°F for 45 minutes.

12. Load your bread: I invert my dough out of the basket/bowl onto parchment, then transfer the parchment onto the hot Dutch oven. Add the loaf tin directly to the oven (no need to preheat the pan).

13. Lower your oven to 475°F. If making the boule, bake it for 20 minutes in the Dutch oven. Remove the lid to let the steam out and then transfer your loaf out of the cast iron to the top rack for another 20 minutes. Bake the loaf in the loaf tin for 20 minutes, then turn it out of the tin onto the top rack and bake for another 20 minutes. I like to bake dark, so sometimes I go a little extra.

14. Let your bread cool completely before slicing, but sometimes I like to tear it open and eat it warm with a little butter!

COOK'S NOTE: *If you do not have a proofing basket, you can use a bowl — just drape the bowl with a clean kitchen towel and sprinkle it with flour, then add your dough and cover as you would a basket. If you don't have a Dutch oven or a cast-iron fryer with a skillet lid, you can use a sheet pan or pizza stone.*