

You Can Eat Bread — as Long as You Make It

Homemade sourdough renders grocery store loaves unacceptable

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I'm standing in my sister's kitchen, discussing her bread dough, which sits warmly nestled in a stainless steel bowl. It's in what's known as the bulk fermentation stage, which means it will sit there for two to four hours.

She excitedly shows me her new bread-making accouterment: sourdough starter, new bench scraper, lame, flours, bannetons, work notes, a prepped and sanitized work area. She's like a new mom about to give birth. It's her first loaf.

There are plenty of sourdough bread-making enthusiasts in the world, and I'm one of them. I've been lovingly producing weekly loaves for about a decade, and it's the only bread I'll eat. Once you try it, commercial bread will fall so short it won't even be an acceptable backup.

Baking and eating sourdough bread can magically transform your life in unexpected ways, and there are several reasons why.

Your bread will be the best damn bread you've ever had, and you'll realize this is how bread is supposed to taste.

First off, it's far more nutritious than anything you'll buy. The commercial bread you buy from a big-box grocer isn't the same bread people ate generations ago. Our modern grain is grown quickly and cheaply in depleted soil. Most flour is overprocessed, the quality is poor, and commercial yeast is an isolated, supercharged chemical that's all about speed. This ultra-processed bread is suspected to be the driver behind an epidemic of gluten intolerance.

Sourdough bread is a fermented food made with wild yeast gathered from the air. All leavened bread was made this way in the past. It's a time-consuming process, but it isn't difficult, and most of it is hands-off. You let the yeast and bacteria do their job while you wait.

The bacteria pre-digests and breaks down the gluten in the bread, so your finished loaf is much easier to digest. And you can choose quality flours from small, family-owned mills to use for your dough that is much higher in nutritional value and isn't overprocessed.

Furthermore, baking your bread offers lessons in patience. In a fast-paced world where everything is instant, the sourdough bread-making process gives you a chance to slow down, live in the moment, and make something with care and pride.

You can't rush it. You have to calmly wait until the magic moment where the dough feels active, alive, and bubbly. Then it's time to shape and bake.

In the beginning, you won't know what to look for. After a few loaves, you'll recognize this alchemy, excitement and pride will burst forth, and anticipation for that warm crusty loaf fresh from the oven will engulf you.

Once you can produce consistently beautiful loaves, you'll want to share them with everyone you know and love. Your bread will be the best damn bread you've ever had, and you'll realize this is how bread is supposed to taste.

You'll want to enlighten your loved ones. You'll also like the way people exclaim, "You made this?" in utter disbelief at your genius.

You'll bring loaves to dinner parties, give them as gifts, and share them with colleagues in the break room.

But perhaps the best part is the learning experience.

Flour, water, and salt. With time and care, these simple, inexpensive ingredients wondrously morph into a loaf of lovely, crusty, airy, delicious, nutritious bread. You'll be mesmerized.

Each loaf will be unique. You'll discover how the steps you take from maintaining your starter, making the dough, and choosing when to bake all affect the outcome. And you'll learn to play around with the steps to produce the most excellent loaves you can.

You'll study, learn, and grow. You may even find yourself making sourdough pancakes, waffles, tortillas, and a vast assortment of other products that offer numerous health benefits compared to their commercially produced cousins.

Ready to give it a try? I started with a book from the well-known San Francisco bakery Tartine, but countless YouTube videos will walk you through the process, and there are entire blogs dedicated to making a sourdough starter. The methods are endless, and you'll develop your own eventually.

So leap. Learn to bake a decent loaf of sourdough bread, and you'll never go hungry again.

Basic Sourdough Bread Recipe:

Here is the recipe I use for my weekly loaves. But you'll need to research the basic techniques of maintaining a sourdough starter, mixing dough, timing, etc. The instructions are too long and varied for this length of an article.

200 g sourdough starter or levain (depending on what technique you use)

900 g unbleached white flour

100 g whole grain flour

750 g water

24 g salt

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