

Storyboard for a baking weekend

Sourdough Bread in the Wood Fired Oven

Welcome stranger to our baking routine! Ever since we completed our oven build, we (and several relatives) have had all our bread baked this way! As we perfected our routine we took notes. This is the English translation of these notes. Note that every flour and oven and climate is different, so your milage may vary. Good luck finding out your routine.



Ingredients

For one oven-load of 6 loafs:

- 3000 g wheat flower (no additives)
- 2000g water (67%)
- 300g (10%) sourdough starter
- 72g (2.4%) salt

The wheat flower can be partially replaced by max. 30% whole wheat flower or max 10% whole rye flour.

We prepare this dough in either 2 or 3 batches. Obviously you carefully weigh your ingredients separately per batch.

Two days before baking

If your starter is already a bit old, then now is a good time to refresh it:

- 1 part sourdough
- 5 parts water
- 1 part whole rye flour
- 4 parts whole wheat flour

One day before baking

9am: Multiply your starter

In the morning we start by refreshing and multiplying our sourdough starter (same feeding proportions as above. If you want plain white bread then just this time it's OK to use plain wheat flour).

The starter must be in top condition by the time we knead. That is: Bubbly and risen to twice its volume. This usually takes 6 hours, depending on room temperature.

2pm (or sooner): Autolyse

Mix the flour with the water in 2 or 3 large bowls (keep a tiny bit of water aside).

Mix well with your hands and keep at least 1 hour under a lid (or wet towel).

3pm: Knead

Now add your starter, salt and the remaining water. Mix for 5 minutes with your hands, preshape for a few minutes into a ball and let it rest for 15 minutes.

3:20: Benching

With wet hands and tools, separate your batch of dough from its bowl onto your clean bench and stretch it into a giant square pizza. If you want to add seeds, now is the time. Let it rest for 5 minutes. Now fold your "pizza" threefold in both directions. Preshape back into a ball and put back in its bowl (which you cleaned in the meanwhile)

3:40 Bulk Fermentation

In this phase your dough should nearly double in volume. This usually takes between 4 to 6 hours. It's a good idea to put aside two tablespoons of dough in a glass to check progress.

After half an hour we do a stretch&fold: With wet hands/tools you separate the dough from the bowl and use gravity to stretch it and fold it in four.

During the first two hours of bulk fermentation we repeat this every half hour. After that we repeat it every hour. When it's time to proceed to the next phase, we don't do a stretch&fold.

9pm Shaping

The dough can now go into their proofing baskets. From now on we use rice flour on our bench and dry hands, and we handle the dough gently as not to collapse the bubbles.

Divide into loafs (500gr flour per loaf). Preshape each part, and let it rest for 5 minutes. In the meanwhile you can spray some rice flour in the proofing baskets. After a final round of gently shaping, you put the loafs upside down in the baskets and spray generously with rice flour.

Proofing

The proofing baskets are covered with a towel and go into the fridge (16 to 24 hours). If you only have 12 hours, then you wait 30 minutes before putting them in the fridge.

Baking Day!

9:45 Fire up the oven

Make a big fire and move it around to heat all parts of the floor. After 11:30 we only add thin pieces of timber. By then the dome should be clear from soot. For the last half hour we don't add wood and just let the embers burn.

1pm Prep the Oven

We remove all remaining embers and ashes. (I use a scoop, a brush-on-a-stick, a copper blow-pipe and finally my small peel covered in a not-too-wet rag).

Now we give the oven some time to equalise the temperature and cool down to 510F floor temperature. The former works best with the door closed, the latter works best with the door open. Get to know your oven!

2pm Let's Bake!

With a floor temperature of 510F it's time to bake. Now get the baskets out of the fridge and work fast: Spray some flour on a large peel, flip a basket, score the loaf and place in the oven.

Now put a tray of boiling hot water in the oven and firmly close the oven door. After 20 minutes remove the tray and leave the door slightly open to let all steam escape. Bake for another 20 minutes like that.

If you experience uneven baking, then that halfway point is also a good opportunity to swap or spin your loafs with a small pizza peel.

Actual baking times depend on many factors, so best to check regularly.