

# Making Your Own Bread



Dried cherry and pistachio sourdough

Currently, if you don't make your own bread, you are probably thinking that making your own bread requires too much time and hard work. Not true! There are ways of making your own bread that suit every schedule and lifestyle.

During the pandemic and being sequestered at home, more people are learning about making bread. You can too.

## No-Knead Version



It doesn't get any easier than this. Revolutionized in 2008 by the book *Artisan Bread in Five Minutes a Day* ([here](#)), you can make artisan bread with minimal effort.



It is as simple as tossing flour, yeast, salt and water into a bowl. Mix to create a shaggy mess and leave alone for 12-16 hours. Form into a ball and bake. See my detailed blog on Making and Baking a Simple Bread post [here](#).



With this toss it and leave it recipe, you can add other ingredients too if you'd like. Another book recommendation is from my friend, Rick. He loves the best-selling book, Flour Water Salt Yeast by Ken Forkish (link [here](#)).

## Sourdough Starter



Using sourdough starter is how I make my bread. The process is much longer but I enjoy scheduling this into my week. The evening before I make the leaven (sourdough starter, flour and water) and let it sit overnight or at least 12 hours.



The next morning I create the dough, which consists of leaven, flour, water and salt. During the rise, I add other ingredients. The rising process begins and generally by late afternoon I am baking bread.



The ONLY recipe book I currently use is Tartine Bread by Chad Robertson (link [here](#)), mostly because I love the very detailed tutorial photos. I'm not confident enough yet to branch out to other styles of bread baking.

The benefits of sourdough bread far outweigh the work. I typically make Lemon, Rosemary and Gruyere or with a dried fruit (cherries, cranberries) and a nut (pistachio or walnuts). Plus I love one with black/green olives, lemon zest and walnuts! Sometimes I make one loaf and use the rest for

fresh pizza dough.

Since we don't eat a LOT of bread, the loaves get sliced and put into the freezer. Perfect for morning toast.



Sourdough bread is a great alternative to conventional bread. Its lower phytate levels make it more nutritious and easier to digest. Sourdough bread also seems less likely to spike your blood sugar levels, which makes it an option for those monitoring their blood sugar. As a result, I rarely use commercial yeast anymore.

For another post on Sourdough Starter Basics, click [here](#).

## Other Methods



Bread in Crockpot [The Kitchn](#)

Even though I do own a bread machine, it is collecting dust in my basement. I love personally interacting with the dough and watching it transform over time. However, I did use the bread machine when the children were younger as they loved coming home from school to the smells of freshly baked bread.

Apparently you can also make bread in your crock pot. Again, this is something I have never done. But if you try it please let me know. Here is a [link](#) to Kitchn's recipe.

# Mental Health Benefits of Baking Bread



Getty images

According to the [Huffington Post](#), in 2017, five people who were mental health residents at Bethlem Royal Hospital in London spent six two-hour sessions baking bread by hand and answered weekly questions about how they felt. They reported feeling happier, creative, and having a sense of achievement. They also revealed that baking bread made them feel more relaxed and less anxious, and that they had a sense of purpose.

I know when I feel out of sorts or stressed, I put on my apron and start baking or cooking. It truly is better than snapping at someone.

## Tips for Successful



Since I have been making bread from scratch for a few years now, I have experienced both success and failure.

One loaf was rather flat after baking. I reviewed all my steps and knew I made it correctly. And then I looked at the bag of flour which was in the freezer. It was dated 2013! How gross is that, especially since it was 2019.

## Make sure all ingredients are fresh



Make sure ALL your ingredients are fresh, especially if you are using either fresh or dried commercial yeast. Check the expiration date. Since yeast is a living organism, it loses its potency and ability to rise over time.



One way to find out if your yeast is stale is to sprinkle a small spoonful over very warm water (not boiling or hot), then sprinkle sugar over the yeast. Do not stir. Cover, and wait ten minutes for the yeast to rise and become frothy/bubbly over the water and sugar. If it does, the yeast is active.

Flour has a long shelf life but generally goes bad after 3–8 months. I always freeze my flour. Freezing flour doesn't affect its qualities if you let it 'come back to life' before using. If you use cold flour to bake, your baked good won't rise. They may also turn out heavy and rubbery.

## **Why Temperature is Important**



Check the temperature of your water before you add it to the yeast. Too cold and the yeast will not activate. Too hot and you will kill the yeast.

Room temperature is equally important. Too cold and your dough will not rise. Double check your recipe for room temperature suggestions. During the winter our kitchen is always cool; but we have the opposite problem in the summer. Drafts and changes in temperature will affect your rise.

## **Salt and Yeast**

After watching too many episodes of The Great British Bake Off, I noticed Paul Hollywood always recommends putting your salt on the opposite side of the bowl from the yeast. Salt can retard yeast growth.

## **Makes Great Gifts**



My neighbor recently had a large flood in her home, resulting

in significant damage. Feeling rather helpless, I baked a loaf of my sourdough bread. Coupled with a jar of homemade apricot marmalade, I dropped it off to share my sympathies for their crisis. What better gift than comfort food?

I love getting homemade gifts. Not only do you receive something lovely, but knowing someone spent the time, energy and effort to make it, is priceless.

## It's Never Too Late to Start



Ursula and her bread

Last year I shared my sourdough starter with Ursula. Ursula is the same age as my sweet Elisabeth, and they attended grammar school together. From what I hear, Ursula is an avid bread baker. Such a wonderful lifelong skill. Just think about it: with four simple ingredients you can feed others. Amazing!

I hope this post is encouraging you at least try making bread at home. Here is why: it is satisfying and rewarding. In this crazy world where few things feel good right now, I feel pure joy when I pull a loaf out of the oven.

Please share any bread making experience you have! I would love to hear your stories.

*Mary*

