How to Bake Sourdough Bread (Step by Step for Beginners)

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A fully illustrated 30-step guide to baking sourdough bread at home: build a starter, mix and fold the dough, proof with a cold ferment, then bake with steam and cool properly.

Phase 1 — Build the Starter and Prepare

1. **Mix equal weights of flour and water**
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2. **Keep it warm and undisturbed for a day**
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3. **Feed it daily and discard half**
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4. **Use it when it doubles and smells tangy**
   Use it when it doubles and smells tangy.
5. **Weigh every ingredient in grams**
   Weigh every ingredient in grams.
6. **Use strong bread flour for structure**
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7. **Autolyse the flour and water first**
   Autolyse the flour and water first.
8. **Check the water temperature**
   Check the water temperature.

Phase 2 — Mix, Fold and Ferment

9. **Add the starter and salt, then pinch together**
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10. **Wet your hands and do stretch-and-folds**
    Wet your hands and do stretch-and-folds.
11. **Repeat the folds every 30 minutes**
    Repeat the folds every 30 minutes.
12. **Stop when the dough is smooth and jiggly**
    Stop when the dough is smooth and jiggly.
13. **Let the dough rise until visibly airy**
    Let the dough rise until visibly airy.
14. **Watch the dough, not the clock**
    Watch the dough, not the clock.
15. **Turn it out and pre-shape gently**
    Turn it out and pre-shape gently.

16. Shape into a tight round or oval

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Phase 3 — Cold Proof and Prepare to Bake

17. Place the shaped loaf seam-up in a banneton

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18. Cover and refrigerate for 8 to 16 hours

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19. Preheat the oven and Dutch oven together

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20. Turn the cold loaf onto baking paper

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21. Dust the top lightly with rice flour

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22. Score one shallow slash with a razor

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23. Lower it into the hot pot and cover

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Phase 4 — Bake, Cool and Keep

24. Bake covered at 245 °C for 20 minutes

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25. Remove the lid and bake 20 to 25 minutes more

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26. Check the internal temperature

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27. Cool on a rack for at least an hour

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28. Store it cut-side down in a bread box

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29. Slice and freeze what you will not eat today

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30. Refresh a day-old slice in a hot pan

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Sources

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3. NHS — Live Well
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Written as a checklist from https://www.howcompass.com/how-to/How-to-Bake-Sourdough-Bread. Corrections: https://www.howcompass.com/c