

Sharp Cheddar Sourdough Bread

Poetry & Pies

prep time: about 30-40 minutes, spread out

rise/resting times: 9-36 hours (depending on where it rises)

baking time: 45-50 minutes

cooling time: 1 hour

total time: 12-38 hours

servings: 12-16



Ingredients & Equipment

for the levain

- 25g active [sourdough starter](#)
- 50g flour
- 50g filtered water, 80F/27C
- [kitchen scale](#)
- [food thermometer](#)
- clean, clear jar (large enough for the levain to double)

for the bread

- 100g levain (active, bubbly starter)
- 375g filtered water, 80F/27C
- 500g bread flour, plus more for shaping
- 10-12g salt (sea salt is ideal)
- ½ cup (4 ounces or 113g) sharp cheddar (block cheese is best)
- large mixing bowl
- [straight container with measurements](#)
- [banneton](#) or medium round bowl with a tea towel
- [parchment paper](#)

Instructions

make the [levain](#)

1. Place 25g active starter in a medium jar or small mixing bowl.

2. Zero out your scale (or the “tare” button) and add 50g warm filtered water, about 80F/27C. Stir with a [small rubber spatula](#) or spoon until mixed well*.
3. Zero out the scale again and add 50g flour. You can use any combination of flours, but if you are just starting out, you can play it safe with all-purpose or bread flour.
4. Mix well, ensuring there is no dry, unmixed flour and no visible lumps of flour.
5. Set the lid loosely on top of the jar or cover with plastic wrap.
6. Store in a spot with moderate temperature (roughly 70F/21C) for 8-12 hours, until it has doubled in volume, bubbles begin to break the surface, and it can pass the float test. Alternatively, you can place it in your turned-off oven with the light on and let it rise for 3-6 hours, depending on climate and the age of your starter. [See this post](#) for suggestions on how to time your levain and dough.

make the bread

7. Once the levain is bubbly and active and passes the float test (see note below), you can begin mixing the bread dough.
8. Add 100g active levain/starter to your mixing bowl. Add 375g filtered water that is roughly 80F/27C. Don't stress if it's a little warmer or a little cooler. Mix until starter is mostly mixed in.
9. Add salt and stir well.
10. Add the bread flour and mix until fully combined. Eventually, it becomes hard to stir. At this point you could use your hands or you can simply use the spatula to somewhat fold the dough together (literally scooping from the edge and folding it over the middle section). Mix until there are no pockets of dry flour. It should be a shaggy dough at this point.
11. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap or a damp towel. Let sit on the counter for roughly 30 minutes (at least 20 but no more than 40).

12. While the dough rests, chop your cheddar into cubes or rectangles roughly $\frac{1}{4}$ inch or so big. Mine were $\frac{1}{4}$ inch x $\frac{1}{4}$ inch x $\frac{1}{2}$ inch. Refrigerate between stretch and folds.
13. Stretch and folds. Once the dough has rested at least 20 minutes, begin performing stretch and folds. Before you start, sprinkle a small handful of cheese on top of the dough. Then, using a clean, damp hand, slide your fingers under one “side” of the bowl and grab that section of dough gently in your hand. Lift up gently to stretch it slightly, folding it over the middle of the dough and sealing in the cheese. It should reach the other side of the bowl or close to it. Rotate the bowl 90 degrees and repeat, sprinkling a few more pieces of cheese each time, until you have stretched and folded all 4 “sides” of the dough and used up about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the cheese.. Depending on the size of your bowl, you may need to do 5-6 stretch and folds for each set. Once done, cover again and let sit on the counter.
14. Repeat this process every 30ish minutes, for a total of 4-5 sets of stretches and folds, adding more cheese each time. You’ll know the dough is ready for the next step when it is smooth, elastic, and becomes more difficult to stretch and fold. As well, you can use the translucency test: pinch a little piece of dough and pull it up until some light can pass through the middle. If light passes through without it breaking, it’s ready.
15. Bulk fermentation. Once you’ve done 4-5 stretch and folds and the dough is smooth and can pass the translucency test, cover it and place in a warm spot (no hotter than 90F/32C) until it has risen in volume by 50%. It should begin to be wobbly at this point. To make this easier, I suggest using a [straight edged vessel](#) so you can better tell when it’s risen 50%.
16. An ideal spot for bulk fermentation is your turned-off oven with the light turned on. However, if you don’t want it to be ready too quickly, you can use the counter. If it is rising too quickly, feel free to put in the fridge to slow down the rise until you are ready to do the shaping.
17. Once it has risen by 50% and is wobbly, gently dump the dough onto a floured surface. You can use bread flour or all-purpose. Pre-shape it by pulling one side up and over about $\frac{2}{3}$ of the way. Pull the opposite side up and over the first fold completely (similar to creating a trifold for a piece of paper). Repeat this with

the other two sides. Gently flip the dough over, cover with plastic wrap, and let rest for about 20 minutes.

18. Shape the dough. If using a round [banneton](#) or bowl, you'll create a round boule. If using a bowl, line it with a tea towel. Optionally, you can sprinkle it with rice flour or bread flour, but this is not necessary unless you want that rustic, floured look and texture. If using a banneton, you must sprinkle it with rice or bread flour. You can also line a banneton with a tea towel to make for easier removal, and this makes sprinkling the flour optional.
19. Remove the plastic wrap from the pre-shaped dough and flip the dough over. Repeat the process of folding one side over then the opposite side, finally folding the two remaining sides to create a somewhat square shape.
20. Next, use the edges of your hands/sides of your pinkies to spin the dough while simultaneously sliding your hand somewhat underneath the dough. This is best done on a non-floured surface, but it can be difficult to work with and stick to your fingers. You can use *either* floured hands *or* damp hands (oddly enough) to do this. As you spin the dough it should create tension on the top and pull it tight. Keep spinning until the top is as tight as possible.
21. If any pieces of cheese break through the top of the dough, remove them and poke them into the bottom when you are finished, sealing them in by pulling a bit of dough over and pressing it firmly to "seal" it in.
22. Flip the dough over and place upside down in the prepared bowl/banneton. To prevent it losing its shape right away, pull the edges of the bottom (currently facing up) together and use damp fingers to press it together, helping keep that tight surface you created on the top (currently facing down). Cover immediately with a piece of plastic wrap, tucking it slightly along the sides to help maintain the shape you created.
23. Final proof. Place the bowl/banneton in the fridge. If using a banneton, it's best to place that inside a plastic shopping bag and tie the handles to prevent the dough drying out. Refrigerate at least 8 hours, up to 36. You can technically do the final proof on the counter for 30-60 minutes (until it's puffed up every so slightly), but this can lead to a flatter loaf.

24. When ready to bake, preheat your oven to 450F/235C. Place your baking vessel inside the oven to preheat as well. I like my [Emile Henry bread pot](#), but a [dutch oven](#) or large cast iron with a lid. Let that preheat for at least 10 minutes after the oven reaches 450F/235C. This allows everything to be properly heated up.
25. Once the oven and baking vessel are preheated, remove the loaf from the fridge. Remove the plastic wrap and turn it over onto a piece of parchment paper. Use a very sharp knife or bread lame (a razor for bread) to cut at least one slash through the dough. You can get fancy or just do something simple.
26. Cut the excess parchment, leaving just enough of an edge to grab it. Remove the baking vessel from the oven and carefully transfer the dough to it. Replace the lid and bake for 30 minutes.
27. After at least 30 minutes, remove the lid and turn the oven down to 400F/205C. Let continue baking 15-20 minutes, until the top is nicely golden brown. If you want a lighter top, it's best to leave the lid on a little longer then reduce how long it bakes without the lid, so that it still bakes for a total of at least 45 minutes.
28. Remove the bread from the pan and remove the parchment. Set on a wire rack to cool at least 1 hour. Cutting a loaf before it's cooled sufficiently does alter the texture, so be sure to time it carefully.

Notes:

1. **The Float test:** to know if a levain is "active" and ready to use, do the float test. When the levain has doubled in volume and the bubbles begin to break the surface, take a small spoonful and place in a cup of room temperature water. If it floats, it's active and ready to use. If your starter is relatively new, you may need to do the float test a couple times. This could mean you need to build a larger levain so that you have enough extra to do multiple float tests.
2. There is a window of when you can use a levain. It can be used when just a couple bubbles break the surface or when the surface is very bubbly. That's why I like the float test, at least when starting out with sourdough, to know it's ready for sure.