

Sourdough Batard (Country Loaf)

Poetry & Pies

prep time: about 30-40 minutes, spread out

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

baking time: 30-35 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)
- large mixing bowl
- [straight container with measurements](#) (optional, but helpful)
- [lidded loaf pan](#) (can use other styles or a sheet pan)
- [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 (see below). 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). At this point, perform the first set of stretch and folds.

12. Stretching and folding is actually quite simple: 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 bowl. It should reach the other side of the bowl or close to it. Rotate the bowl 90 degrees and repeat, until you have stretched and folded all 4 “sides” of the dough. 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.
13. Repeat this process every 30ish minutes, for a total of 4-5 sets of stretches and folds. 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.
14. 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%.
15. 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.
16. 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.
17. Now shape the dough. Prep your [long](#) or [oval banneton](#) by either sprinkling with rice or bread flour or lining it with a thin tea towel. If using an oval or oblong bowl, line with a tea towel and optionally sprinkle with rice or bread flour.

18. Remove the plastic wrap from the pre-shaped dough. I find the easiest way to shape it is to use plenty of flour and fold it like a trifold letter a couple of times lengthwise (so fold the bottom third up and across the middle, then the top third down and across the middle). Each time you fold it, press it down and outward to elongate the loaf. You can also flip it over and use the edges of your hands to create some tension on the top of the loaf.
19. Place the loaf upside down in the prepared bowl/banneton. To prevent it losing its shape right away, use damp fingers to pinch the seam 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.
20. 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.
21. 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 lidded loaf pan](#) but also want to get [this oval one](#), but an oval dutch oven or cast iron with a lid will work too. You could also use a baking sheet and simply place a pan filled with 1 cup of ice on the rack beneath it to create a crunchy crust. Let that preheat for at least 10 minutes after the oven reaches 450F/235C. This allows everything to be properly heated up.
22. 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.
23. 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.
24. After 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. If not using a lidded vessel, simply turn the oven down after 30 minutes to avoid it burning on top.

25. Remove the bread from the pan and remove the parchment, if using. 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.