

Sourdough Levain

Poetry & Pies

prep time: 5 minutes

rise time: 3-12 hours (depending on ambient temperature and age of starter)

total time: 12 hours (or less)

Ingredients & Equipment

- 25g active [sourdough starter](#)
- 50g flour
- 50g water, filtered and roughly 80F/27C
- [kitchen scale](#)
- [food thermometer](#)
- clean, clear jar



Instructions

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.

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. See note #3 for alternative amounts.
2. There is a window of when you can use a levain (i.e. add it to your bread dough). 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.
3. You can adjust the amounts based on your recipe (such as doubling the recipe to make two loaves). I always figure out how much I need total, add 25g more (to do the float test and because some gets stuck to the spatula or jar), then divide that by 5. That’ll tell me how much starter I need. I’ll need double that in flour and water (so 1 part starter, 2 parts flour, and 2 parts water—meaning 5 parts total). Here are some common amounts:
 - a. For 150g: 35g starter, 70g flour, 70g water (*total weight: 175g*)
 - b. For 200g: 45g starter, 90g flour, 90g water (*total weight: 225g*)
 - c. For 250g: 55g starter, 110g flour, 110g water (*total weight: 275g*)
 - d. For 300g: 65g starter, 130g flour, 130g water (*total weight: 325g*)
4. *I prefer to mix the starter and water before adding flour. You are welcome to add and mix in any order you prefer, as long as it’s mixed thoroughly.