



thePArtsanbaker
Vol. 1

Sourdough

your guidebook to the world of
Naturally Leavened Bread

Techniques & Recipes
from

Bethesda bakers

Mick Hartley: I am a practical, down-to-earth baker of naturally leavened bread with well over twenty years baking experience. In 2007 I set up Bethesdabakers, a pioneering home-based microbakery in North Wales supplying individual and commercial customers. This venture has produced a legacy of over 100 sourdough breads for my baking repertoire. I am the originator of the Bethesdabakin' annual baking weekends which started in 2007 and continue to this day. I have written and published bread books and teach bread courses for both home bakers and those wishing to set up professional microbakeries.



Photo by Annie Williams

This book is a totally revised version of “Bethesdabasics – Sourdough Made Simple” which was published by The PArtisan Press in 2010.

My other books (more on the way!):

“Bara Blas” ISBN 978-0-9570134-2-1 The PArtisan Press 2013 – a Welsh language version of “Bethesdabasics”

“Microbakin’ – Baking Bread for Sale at Home” ISBN 978-0-9570134-1-4 The PArtisan Press 2012

Contact me via the blog www.thepartisanbaker.com to purchase or for information about the books and for details about courses and consultancy.

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Naturally Leavened Bread**

**Techniques & Recipes
from**

Bethesdabakers

**Words & Photographs
Mick Hartley
aka The PArtisan Baker**

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Introduction

I've been peddling the myth of Bethesda and its world famous sourdough bakery, Bethesdabakers, for years. Posts I sent to various internet bread forums under the name "Bethesdabakers" suggested a place in Snowdonia whose moist climate puts it a little ahead of San Francisco as the perfect location for producing sourdough loaves. Periodically I reinforced this suggestion by posting photographs "from the bakery webcam". So by the time I organised Bethesdabakin', an international baking event held at the village's rugby club in 2007, a lot of people were convinced that I actually ran a bakery here.

Well I do now. I set up a microbakery towards the end of 2007 in our little terraced house where I knocked out around 150 naturally leavened loaves in the course of a weekly two-day bake. I started off baking seven regular breads each session and during the first few months introduced a weekly special, a rye and a flatbread which became augmented with sweet and savoury brioches, other enriched doughs and festive breads for all occasions. These specials were developed to produce variety to maintain the customers' interest. On top of this I began supplying a freelance chef who changed his menus and regional cuisines every week and wanted breads which didn't have to be exactly authentic but needed to reflect some aspect of the weekly theme. So within a year or two the repertoire had grown to over one hundred breads of all types.

You can read the story of how I arrived at this point, the history of the bakery and learn how to set up your own microbakery in "Microbakin' – Baking Bread for Sale at Home".

This book is a sourdough primer giving you clear, simple steps for making good bread using a selection of recipes from the Bethesdabakers' repertoire. It is the first in a series of ebooks for sourdough bakers showing you how I work and providing you with breads from my wide ranging repertoire.

I have deliberately kept the book simple (without cutting corners or sacrificing quality) to make it suitable for absolute beginners. However there is an awful lot of bad and incomplete information in circulation about sourdough and more experienced bakers may well benefit from using the book to reappraise their bread making methods.

Naturally Leavened Bread

Naturally leavened bread is a bit of a mouthful, as you might say. But it's a better description than its more common name, sourdough, which people can find off-putting with its implied acidic taste. It can be sour but only if you set out to make it that way. It certainly does have more flavour and substance than commercially yeasted, supermarket and factory breads.

Naturally leavened bread uses wild yeasts in a starter as a raising agent instead of commercial yeast. A starter is made by mixing a paste of flour and water and letting it sit until it becomes active with natural yeasts and benign bacteria when it will begin to ferment and bubble. Once this happens more flour and water is added to the mix which feeds the natural yeasts and keeps the process running.

The baker takes a portion of this starter and makes his bread dough with additional flour, water and salt. The gas produced by the natural yeast in the fermentation process causes the bread to rise and the lactic acids produced by the bacteria give the bread flavour.

The baker holds back the remainder of the starter, refreshes it (feeds it with more flour and water) and keeps it for the next bake. Saving disasters, this process can be continued indefinitely. My current starter has been bubbling happily since October 1999.

There is no legal definition of sourdough but the stuff labelled as such in supermarkets almost certainly isn't. For the most part it is yeasted bread with added flavouring – powdered starter, lactic acid, even lemon juice or vinegar.

It is often forgotten that bread is a fermented food – and fermentation takes time. Time is what has been eliminated from the commercial baking process and it has been suggested that the increase in wheat intolerance is at least partly due to the fact that doughs are no longer fermented properly. And that's as far as I am prepared to go down the pseudo-science path.

You don't need health reasons to eat sourdough. It tastes and looks good – it has texture, flavour and crusts you need teeth for. The length of fermentation gives it several days shelf-life and it ages rather than stales so that its character changes as it gets older.

There is no limit to its variety – any bread that can be made with yeast can be made with leaven.

The basics of making a sourdough loaf are so simple I can describe them in a few sentences. Weigh out flour, water, starter and salt and mix them in a bowl until they come together. Scrape the mix onto a work surface and knead for three short periods with brief rests in between. Allow the dough to rise for 4 hours, shape it and let it rise for a further 3½ hours. Slash the top, bake for 50 minutes, cool.

It really is that straightforward. All that stands between you and your objective of becoming a baker is access to an active starter, having a few more detailed instructions and a bit of pluck which will develop into confidence and judgment with a little practice.

Before moving on to making a starter I just want to say a little about the way I feel about bread and bread making. The transformation of flour and water into bread is a truly amazing phenomenon and is beautiful in its simplicity: starter (fermenting flour and water) + flour + water + salt + heat = bread. That perfect simplicity should be treated with respect: you can't improve on basic bread. So, use the finest ingredients that are available to you and set out to develop a feel for the stages the dough goes through. Don't add anything to the basic ingredients (flour, water, salt) without a reason. A reason could be because you fancy olive bread or a sweet breakfast bread or even adding a joke ingredient because it's Halloween so long as you know why you're doing it. But adding sugar and fats routinely as a lot of recipes require is totally unnecessary and using ingredients to make up for your lack of baking skills (commercial yeast, ascorbic acid, etc) deserves vile and horrible punishment. Keep yourself rooted in the basic breads.

Making a Starter

Never trust a baker who will not give you some of their starter to get you going (or to rescue you in an emergency) – and I mean give and not sell. You can buy starter over the net but reports about their reliability are mixed and some of their claims are rather far fetched. At the end of the day, most people want ownership of their starter; to know that they began

the process of fermentation, nurtured it until it became mature, and maintained it into old age.

The only problem arising from this is that beginners tend to make the whole thing too personal; they worry if their starters don't thrive, they take failure to heart, they get emotionally attached to their starters and give them pet names. The process of making bread is dramatic enough without getting romantically involved with your starter. You can afford to be dispassionate and accept that a starter is just a fermenting paste of flour and water. You can probably start using it within seven or eight days, but it may be a little precarious for several weeks while it becomes stable. Then, with a little care, it will probably last forever. But its age has no relevance. After those first few months it doesn't keep improving like fine wine. I know, a few paragraphs ago I said that my starter was made around 2000 and at about the same time I obtained a rye starter from Andrew Whitley's Village Bakery (now Bread Matters) that was supposed to be over a hundred years old – and from Russia to add to the mystique. But it's all kidology – it doesn't make it any better. So if one dies on you, make another.

Let's Make a Starter

You don't actually "make" a starter; you try to create conditions favourable to flour and water starting to ferment and then, when fermentation has begun, to nurture the process until your mixture is fully active. Finally you need to know how to maintain your starter so that it can provide you with a lifetime of good bread.

(Notes: You may hear from other sources a number of names for "starter" or the stages a starter is at – levain, mother, chef, preferment, etc. You can check these out later in your baking career if you want but "starter" is the only name I will be using in this book.

Some authors give methods for starter creation that use grapes, raisins, honey, yoghurt, etc. because they claim that the outcome is more dependable. Nothing wrong with that except that it gives growth to myths such as it is impossible to make a starter unless you have black grapes with white mould on them. It is easy to find such methods on the internet. I advise you to avoid famous names who are not sourdough specialists and to make sure you use pure ingredients.)

This method just uses flour and water which after all are the ingredients you will be baking with. Contrary to popular opinion you are not waiting for natural yeasts to fall from the sky into your jar, the yeasts arrive with your flour just waiting to become active. I have used this method several times without failure but I have never done it without a scare in the process. Bubbles appear, you think the mixture's active only for them to disappear. Persevere! It is probably gas producing bacteria becoming active and fading before the yeasts start to work.

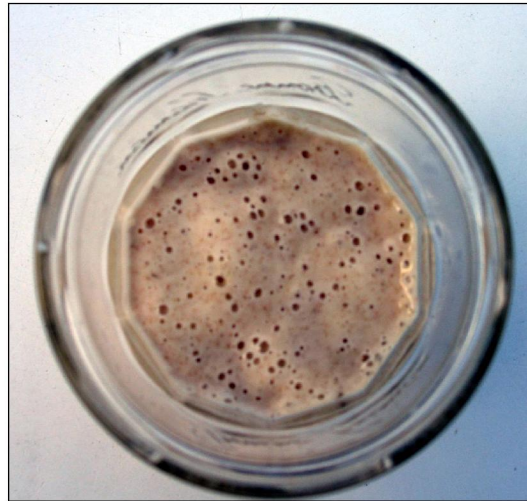
Mix 50g of strong white bread flour with 50g water to form a paste.

Use a non-corrosive container – glass is useful, something like a jam jar is a good size at this stage - because you can see what's going on, but not essential.

Cover the container to stop foreign bodies falling in and to stop the mixture drying out. Don't seal the jar unless you want it to explode! Keep at ambient (room) temperature – around 20C-30C.



Left: First signs of activity Right: Becoming active Below: Active



Within 48 hours there will probably be gas bubbles forming. If there are no signs of activity after three or four days throw it out and start again

Once there are definitely signs of activity, refresh the starter by taking 50g of the mixture and stirring in the same weight of water and the same weight of flour. Throw out the remaining mixture

Wait until your new mixture is producing bubbles (give it at least 12 hours and don't worry if it is longer) repeat the previous refreshment

Repeat for two or three days until the activity in the starter is vigorous.

You can bake your first loaf within seven or eight days if your starter is successful but it will continue to gain strength and stability over a longer period.

Starter Maintenance

Once your starter is active, keep it at room temperature and refresh every 12 hours or so (morning and evening) until you feel it has become established. Then, unless you are baking

several times a week, it is probably best stored in the fridge and refreshed weekly. If kept at room temperature switch to 24 hour refreshments. You may be concerned at using only 50g of starter per refreshment and discarding the rest. But if you don't, within days you'll have kilos of the stuff; when we reach the next stage we'll be able to control the waste more easily.

Your starter is made up of equal weights of flour and water (what is known as 100% hydration) and we have been refreshing it at a ratio of 1:1:1 (50g starter: 50g water: 50g flour).

I'm assuming you are going to be so eager to make your first loaf you'll want to do so at the earliest opportunity. Bear in mind that sourdough is a two day process. So the day before you bake, in the morning make up two refreshments, one for your loaf and one to be kept for subsequent bakes – let's call the latter the store starter.

Make up two mixes of 50g starter, 50g water, 50g flour = 150g. Cover them both to stop them drying out – put one, your store starter, in the fridge and leave the other at room temperature.

In the evening refresh the starter that was left at room temperature again at a ratio of 1:1:1, Most of the recipes in the book call for just under 150g of starter so if you are making a single loaf you can take 50g starter, 50g water, 50g flour. If you are doing two loaves use 100g:100g:100g. In the morning this will be ready for your final dough.

Your store starter is now safely in the fridge. For the moment, until it has matured and is stable, it is advisable to refresh it once a week. This is no great hardship. If the bread bug gets you you will probably want to bake on at least a weekly basis. Assuming you bake on a Saturday, on Friday morning take your store starter out of the fridge, make up two refreshments, put one back in the fridge, leave the second one out for an evening refreshment which will go in Saturday morning's dough.

All sorts of different hydrations and refreshment proportions are possible once you have mastered the basics of sourdough baking. But please stick to my methods until you are confident of what you are doing. Remember that to keep a starter healthy you must at least double its weight when you refresh it. Beginners often think they will swamp a starter by large additions of flour and water. However this is necessary – small additions will weaken and starve your starter over time.

Starters become amazingly resilient once they are established and, contrary to popular belief, are quite hard to kill. Exposure to high temperatures will do it but they can be stored in the fridge for months, frozen or dehydrated and revived at a later date.

Equipment

You don't need any specialist equipment to start making bread. That sentence was the reason a specialist baking equipment company refused to stock the original edition of this book. So it must be true.

Everything you need probably already exists in your kitchen so, before you rush out to spend money, it's worth considering your motivation. Do you want to look like a baker or produce good bread? The two aren't mutually exclusive of course and if you can afford it why not

spend out on good gear, although thank God pro bakers don't wear Lycra. On the other hand there is no need for any large outlay of money.

You won't get far, with these recipes anyway, without an oven but you probably already knew that. It doesn't need to be an expensive oven; some of my best bread comes out of the cheapest domestic oven we could find from a store "never knowingly undersold".

Unless you have a disability you don't need a mixer in fact a mixer can be a hindrance to understanding your dough. Get your hands in there – it's the only way to learn!

Digital scales are a huge help and are pretty cheap these days. You can put your mixing bowl on the scales add the first ingredient, zero the read-out, add the second, etc. Get used to metric, weigh everything in grams, including the water (but a handy thing to know: 1ml = 1 gram).



In 2007 when I started baking for sale and after 15 years of home baking, this was pretty well all I had in the way of equipment: an assortment of baking sheets and baking tins, a ragbag of mixing bowls for starters and doughs, a collection of baskets for proving dough, a dough scraper, a brush for sweeping up flour, a pastry brush, a probe and background thermometer, a razor and razor blades, a set of digital scales and a jug (for pouring not measuring). Not shown is a heap of cotton tea towels for lining proving baskets, covering dough, etc. You will read in other places that only linen will do otherwise dough will stick to the cloth but I have never had a problem with cotton. I indulged myself with one very expensive, smart, 2 kilo, lined proving basket which is a lovely object but quite unnecessary.

You need some sort of plastic sheeting to place on top of the cloth covering your dough to prevent evaporation. This could be a polythene bag, cling-film whatever's big enough to cover the area. Having overestimated the amount of bubble-wrap I needed for presents one Christmas, this is what I currently use.

Flours

The main flours required for the bread formulas in this book are Strong White Bread Flour, Wholemeal Wheat Flour and Wholemeal Rye Flour.

The information supplied by the flour companies is pretty pathetic but you will usually be able to spot the protein content on the packaging and this gives you some guide to the gluten content. This should be around 11.5% and most supermarket bread flours will be around this level. Avoid products with names like "Very Strong Canadian Bread Flour" weighing in at about 14.0% which sound perfect but ain't.

Use organic. I'm not saying the flavour is better but the means of production are kinder to the soil, there is no run-off of nitrates into rivers and, anyway, why eat pesticides?

Wholemeal Rye Flour, in addition to its bread making uses, is also essential for dusting proving baskets and baking sheets.

Bread Making Cycle

We've looked at producing active starter for dough-making: one refreshment about 24 hours before the dough is to be mixed followed by a second refreshment 12 hours before the mix.

Practical example - Day One: refresh starters in the morning and in the evening. Morning
Day Two: mix the dough.

After the dough is mixed it is allowed to rise twice: the first rise is called Fermentaion (Bulk Fermentation if you are making a number of loaves because they are not weighed and shaped until the end of this period); the second is the Proof.

The rising periods will vary according to the temperature and type of dough, but, as an example, in a temperate climate like the UK my timing is routinely 4 hours fermentation, 3½ hours proof.

The oven is preheated to 200-220C.

After being proved the bread is baked for about 50 minutes.

The final stage is cooling. The bread is cooled on a rack with space for the air to circulate.

Dough Making Basics

When you first start baking, everything that will shortly become straightforward and simple seems awkward and intimidating. Which brings us to the first Great Truth of Bread Making: dough is sticky. No, you are not doing it wrong, dough sticks to your hands, to work surfaces, to everything it comes in contact with. That's why they make glue out of flour and water. And that's why God made dough scrapers – to scrape the dough off your hands, work surfaces, and everything else it has come into contact with.

As an untidy person I can assure you that it pays to do a little preparation before you start mixing:

Clear an adequate space in which you will be comfortable working.

Clear the sink and have a bowl of warm water in it.

Always keep your dough scraper in the same place near your work surface so that you just have to reach out your hand and it's there.

Take out all of your ingredients and equipment before you start.

Have a bowl of flour on your work surface to flour your hands.

Simple things, but they can avoid a lot of frustration when your hands are covered in dough and the vital object is missing.

Mixing, Kneading & Stretching

A large, lightweight, bowl is best for mixing. Add the water first so the flour sticks less to the bottom and sides, stir in any other liquid ingredients, then the starter, followed by the flour and salt.

Use your hands for mixing; this will give you a much better feel for what you are doing. Start gently so that you don't cause explosions of flour to shower the surrounding kitchen, scraping down the sides of the bowl with one hand and stirring as you revolve it with the other. When the flour is a little dampened down, repeatedly squeeze the mixture through your fingers until you have a reasonably homogenised dough. A minute or two's work.

Scrape the dough onto your work surface. Knead by pushing the far side of the dough away from you with the heel of your lead hand whilst pulling the near side towards you with the knuckles of your other hand. Roll the far end back to the near end to form a cylinder, give the dough a quarter turn then knead again. Knead ten times then rest the dough for ten minutes.

Do this three times. So it's:

Mix in the bowl, knead 10 times on the work surface, 10 minutes rest

knead 10 times, 10 minutes rest

knead 10 times

Make a rough ball with the dough, place in an oiled bowl, seam side down, and cover with cling film or similar to stop the dough drying out. Allow to ferment for about four hours.

To flour or not to flour? Some people dust a little flour on the worktop when kneading, others spread a film of oil. Having tried all the combinations generally speaking I don't use anything except maybe a little flour at the end when I'm rounding up the dough and when I'm dividing and shaping dough before proving. What you should do is keep your hands floured – if the dough starts to stick to them, drop it on the work surface and re-flour your hands.

During the fermentation period you can improve the structure of the dough by giving it a stretch roughly once an hour. Take the dough out of the bowl and gently stretch to form a rectangle. Fold the dough over itself in thirds (fold one end over two thirds of the dough and fold the other end over that).

Turn the dough a quarter so that the right side is nearest to you and repeat the stretch and fold. Reshape the dough into a rough ball and return to the bowl. This is not essential especially if you have other things to do during the fermentation period.

Shaping & Proving

The most common shape for the majority of the breads in this book is a round or boule. Improvise a proving basket. Find a cane basket about 8 inches in diameter or a colander or just a bowl, line it with a tea towel and sprinkle liberally with rye flour.

Lightly sprinkle your work surface with a little strong white bread flour.

Step 1



Step 2



Step 3

Step 1: Place your dough on the work surface, seam side up, and press it out into a circle with your fingers. Lift the dough to make sure it's not sticking. Step 2: Fold the left and right edges of the top half of the circle into the centre. Step 3: Fold the top edge down to just beyond the centre line and press firmly with the heel of your hand to seal.

Step 4: Turn the whole thing round so that the end nearest to you is now furthest away. Fold the left and right edges into the centre. Step 5: Fold down the top left and the top right corners into the centre to give you a round, then seal firmly again with the heel of your hand.

Step 4



Step 5



Step 6: Turn it over. Cup your hands around the ball and stretch the dough underneath itself repeatedly while turning the ball . Keep the dough in contact with the work surface and you will see the ball tighten as it drags on the work surface and seals the folds. Press on the top of the ball to complete the seal.

Step 6



Step 7: Place the dough ball in the container seam side up, fold over the corners of the tea

towel and cover with plastic sheet. Allow to prove at room temperature for about four hours. You can monitor the dough's progress by lightly pressing it with a floured finger. In the early stages the indentation will close rapidly but this becomes slower as it proves. The perfect stage is when there is still a little push left in the dough. This takes experience to recognise so for your first effort give the dough 3½-4 hours.

Step 7



Proved

Slashing, Baking, Cooling

Preheat your oven to about 210C. It will take 30 minutes to do this properly. Flour a baking sheet with rye flour. Gently turn the dough out onto the baking sheet. Make a number of slashes in the surface of the dough with a razor blade or sharp serrated knife and place in the oven.

Bake for 50 minutes checking after maybe 30 minutes – if it starts to burn turn the oven down to 200C.

If you have a probe thermometer the internal temperature of the baked loaf should be around 95C.

Cool completely on a wire rack.



Producing steam/using a baking stone. Most authors recommend imitating a bakers oven through the use of a preheated baking stone and creating steam in the baking chamber with spray guns, trays of water, ice cubes etc.. Personally I have never noticed the slightest difference with or without.

Bakers' Percentage

The ingredient weights in this book for loaf breads will produce 940g of dough which after water loss during baking will provide loaves of about 800g, a British Standard Large Loaf. You can multiply or divide the ingredient weights to produce smaller, larger or multiple loaves so homebakers don't actually need to understand bakers' percentage. In the long run it is worth tackling but skip this section if you just want to get on with learning how to bake bread.

In the first version of this book I tried to reduce the information to the minimum required by someone coming new to baking. Simplicity was the objective. So I carefully avoided the topic of bakers' percentage because beginners (and more experienced bakers) can find the concept difficult to grasp. Wouldn't you know it, even as the first edition was travelling up the M1 from the printers everyone started talking bakers' percentage. Out of date practically before the books came out of the box.

Bread "recipes" are expressed as formulas such as the simple example below:

	Grams	%
Strong Bread Flour	1000	100
Water	600	60
Starter	300	30
Salt	20	2

In bakers' percentage the flour weight is taken as 100% and every other ingredient is expressed as a percentage of the flour weight.

That sounds perverse. But commercial bakers are not scooping out flour from 1K bags for individual loaves; they are baking by multiples of sacks. So they need to know the proportion of ingredients which combined with one sack of flour will produce the perfect dough. They can then scale up the formula to produce the size of bake they require.

It's not as complicated as it sounds. Generally speaking salt is usually 2.0%, starter around 30% (although other bakers may have other preferences), so in a simple formula like the one above the only main variable is the water. Even with water most commercial bakers want an easy life when it comes to dough handling so once they are familiar with a flour they will stick to the same proportion of water. In fact, sometimes you see flour labelled by the optimum percentage of water it will absorb. So a 60% flour should absorb 60g water for every 100g flour.

Using bakers' percentage makes it much easier to communicate formulas to other bakers because there's no need to specify weights; the other baker can decide the dough weight they require and calculate from the percentages. For example, using the formula above, if a baker wanted 5 kilos (5000g) of dough, he totals the percentages in the right hand column = 192, divides 5000 by 192 = 26.04. He then multiplies the percentage for each ingredient by

26.04. So Flour becomes 2604g (26.04×100), Water becomes 1562.4g, Starter becomes 781.2g, Salt 52.08g which totals 4999.68g.

Of course what the baker really does is to store the formulas in a spread sheet calculator which computes the ingredient weights for the number and weights of the loaves in his order book and stops him getting brain damage.

Once you are used to bakers' percentage you can begin to visualise the type and consistency of an unfamiliar bread just from the proportions in the formula. Formulas are also helpful when you get to the stage of developing your own breads. Looking at the proportion of ingredients (butter, seeds, nuts etc.) in a formula you are familiar with will give you a starting point for designing a similar dough.

I did tell you it was OK skip this section ...

The Recipes

My intention here is to provide you with a small number of recipes which cover a wide range of styles so as to demonstrate the flexibility of naturally leavened bread.

My point is that sourdough is a method of leavening not a single type of bread as the food writers would have us believe when they call for “sourdough” to accompany one of their recipes.

The first six are the regulars I used to bake each week at Bethesdabakers:

Pain de Campagne

Mick’s Classic

Wholemeal

5 Seed with Spelt

Multigrain

Baguette

In addition I offered customers a Special, a Rye and a Flat Bread or Brioche which would change every week and I’m giving you an example of each – in fact, as a bonus, you get a Flat Bread and a Brioche:

Tomato Bread with Sun Dried Tomatoes

100% Russian Rye

Parmesan & Courgette Flat Bread

Brioche au Fromage de Brebis aux Figs

By way of contrast I’m giving you two breads that, in combination with other ingredients, make up a meal in themselves:

Pizza Dough

Wheat Tortillas

These both have sample recipes to get you using them.

Finally, to make up a thirteenth recipe:

Red Grape & Fennel Seed Focaccia

The recipes for loaf breads are mainly for one 800g loaf

More of the Bethesdabakers repertoire will be becoming available in forthcoming volumes in this series.

Pain de Campagne



A classic white sourdough – this is the bread the food writers mean when they talk about sourdough. The photo shows a 2 kilo loaf. Notice the attractive effect created by a scattering of sesame seed in the proving basket and the strong but simple slashes which were made with a sharp, serrated tomato knife, blade at 90 degrees to the crust.

	Grams	%
Strong Bread Flour	502	100
Water	296	59
Starter	133	26.4
Salt	9	1.7
Dough Weight	940	
Loaf Weight	800	

Mix the dough as described in Dough Making Basics. That is, pour the water and starter into a mixing bowl; add the flour and salt, use your hands to stir till the flour is dampened then squeeze vigorously through your fingers until a dough is formed scraping down the bowl so that everything is incorporated; scrape the dough onto the work surface and knead ten times; rest for a few minutes then knead a further ten times; rest and knead for a third time.

Form into a rough ball, place in a lightly oiled bowl, cover. Allow to ferment for about four hours stretching each hour for the first three hours. This is not essential but will improve the dough structure.

Prepare a proving basket. If you like, sprinkle the base with a little sesame or poppy seed for effect. Shape the dough and place it in the proving basket seam side up. Cover and leave for 3½-4 hours checking with the finger tip test after 3 hours.

Preheat the oven to about 210C.

Gently turn out the dough onto a baking sheet floured with wholemeal rye. Slash and bake for about 50 minutes.

Cool on a wire rack.



Mick's Classic Sourdough



Bit of a pretentious name I hear you say. But, simple as it is, this is the first formula I developed that I was happy with and proud to call my own. Pictured is another 2 kilo loaf – my weakness is for big, French-style rustic loaves and with this formula I started to produce bread that at least resembled my ambitions.

	Grams	%
Strong Bread Flour	245	50
Wholemeal Wheat Flour	245	50
Water	306	62.5
Starter	137	28
Salt	8	1.7
Dough Weight	940	
Loaf Weight	800	

Mix the dough as described in Dough Making Basics. Pour the water and starter into a mixing bowl; add the flours and salt, use your hands to stir till the flour is dampened then squeeze vigorously through your fingers until a dough is formed scraping down the bowl so that everything is incorporated; scrape the dough onto the work surface and knead ten times; rest for a few minutes then knead a further ten times; rest and knead for a third time.

Form into a rough ball, place in a lightly oiled bowl, cover. Allow to ferment for about four hours stretching each hour for the first three hours. This is not essential but will improve the dough structure.

Prepare a proving basket. Shape the dough and place it in the basket seam side up. Cover

and leave for 3½-4 hours checking with the finger tip test after 3 hours.

Preheat the oven to about 210C.

Gently turn out the dough onto a baking sheet floured with wholemeal rye. Slash and bake for about 50 minutes.

Cool on a wire rack



Wholemeal Wheat



Not sure why wholemeal bread is thought to be boring – possibly because it’s supposed to be good for you. A properly made naturally leavened wholemeal is the most delicious bread there is revealing the full flavour of good wheat. This loaf has been slashed with an inscribed circle close to the edge of the dough and is decorated with a few wheat grains.

	Grams	%
Wholemeal Wheat Flour	478	100
Water	320	67
Starter	134	28
Salt	8	1.7
Dough Weight	940	
Loaf Weight	800	

Mix the dough as described in Dough Making Basics. Pour the water and starter into a mixing

bowl; add the flour and salt, use your hands to stir till the flour is dampened then squeeze vigorously through your fingers until a dough is formed scraping down the bowl so that everything is incorporated; scrape the dough onto the work surface and knead ten times; rest for a few minutes then knead a further ten times; rest and knead for a third time.

Form into a rough ball, place in a lightly oiled bowl, cover. Allow to ferment for about four hours stretching each hour for the first three hours. This is not essential but will improve the dough structure.

Prepare a proving basket. If you like, sprinkle the base with a little wheat grain for effect. Shape the dough and place it in the proving basket seam side up. Cover and leave for 3½-4 hours checking with the finger tip test after 3 hours.

Preheat the oven to about 210C.

Gently turn out the dough onto a baking sheet floured with wholemeal rye. Slash and bake for about 50 minutes.

Cool on a wire rack.



Note how the water content (hydration) has crept up: Campagne 59.0%, Classic 62.5%, Wholemeal 67.0%. The higher the proportion of the whole grain in the flour the more water it will absorb.

Five Seed with Spelt



This crunchy, flavoursome bread seems to be everyone's favourite. The formula introduces you to a new concept – the soaker. A soaker is a mixture of grains, flakes or seeds to be added to the dough but before this is done it is soaked in advance with a measured amount of water. This water is absorbed softening the ingredients and preventing them from drawing water from the liquid in the final dough. Soaking is also supposed to add to the nutritional value by making seeds easier to digest.

	Grams	*%
Boiling Water	100	23.9
Poppy Seed	20	4.8
Pumpkin Seed	20	4.8
Golden Linseed	20	4.8
Sunflower Seed	20	4.8
Sesame Seed (unhulled)	20	4.8

***% of the flour weight**

Several hours before mixing the dough stir together the seeds and the hot water.

	Grams	%
Strong Bread Flour	335	80
Wholemeal Spelt Flour	84	20
Water	197	47
Starter	117	28
Salt	7	1.7
Soaker	200	48
Dough Weight	940	
Loaf Weight	800	

Mix the dough as described in Dough Making Basics. Stir the soaker into the water and pour into a mixing bowl together with the starter; add the flour and salt, use your hands to stir till the flour is dampened then squeeze vigorously through your fingers until a dough is formed scraping down the bowl so that everything is incorporated; scrape the dough onto the work surface and knead ten times; rest for a few minutes then knead a further ten times; rest and knead for a third time.

Form into a rough ball, place in a lightly oiled bowl, cover. Allow to ferment for about four hours stretching each hour for the first three hours. This is not essential but will improve the dough structure.

Prepare a proving basket. If you like, sprinkle the base with a scattering of the same seeds that go into the soaker for effect. Shape the dough and place it in the proving basket seam side up. Cover and leave for 3½-4 hours checking with the finger tip test after 3 hours.

Preheat the oven to about 210C.

Gently turn out the dough onto a baking sheet floured with wholemeal rye. Slash and bake for about 50 minutes.

Cool on a wire rack.



Multigrain



This time the soaker comprises a variety of nutritious grains which produce a burst of flavours guaranteed to satisfy the desires of the most ardent of bread lovers.

	Grams	*%
Boiling Water	109	28.1
Millet	22	5.6
Jumbo Oats	22	5.6
Bulgar	22	5.6
Polenta	22	5.6

*% of the flour weight

Several hours before mixing the dough stir together the grains and the hot water.

	Grams	%
Strong Bread Flour	194	50
Wholemeal Wheat Flour	194	50
Water	242	62.6
Starter	108	28
Salt	7	1.7
Soaker	196	50.5
Dough Weight	940	
Loaf Weight	800	

Mix the dough as described in Dough Making Basics. Stir the soaker into the water and pour into a mixing bowl together with the starter; add the flour and salt, use your hands to stir till

the flour is dampened then squeeze vigorously through your fingers until a dough is formed scraping down the bowl so that everything is incorporated; scrape the dough onto the work surface and knead ten times; rest for a few minutes then knead a further ten times; rest and knead for a third time.

Form into a rough ball, place in a lightly oiled bowl, cover. Allow to ferment for about four hours stretching each hour for the first three hours. This is not essential but will improve the dough structure.

Prepare a proving basket. If you like, sprinkle the base with a scattering of the same grains that go into the soaker for effect. Shape the dough and place it in the proving basket seam side up. Cover and leave for 3½-4 hours checking with the finger tip test after 3 hours.

Preheat the oven to about 210C.

Gently turn out the dough onto a baking sheet floured with wholemeal rye. Slash and bake for about 50 minutes.

Cool on a wire rack.



Baguettes

The first thing to bear in mind before you get carried away with your enthusiasm is that a Parisian-length baguette will not fit in your domestic oven.



These baguettes are made with Pain de Campagne dough and are scaled (weighed) at 200g which will give a length suitable for a standard baking sheet.

The Campagne recipe at the start of this section will give you five baguettes if you scale the dough slightly smaller at 188g.

The formula for a single 200g baguette is as follows. As it's highly unlikely you would want to make a single baguette calculate multiples from the formula.

	Grams	%
Strong Bread Flour	107	100
Water	63	59
Starter	28	26.4
Salt	2	1.7
Dough Weight	200	

Mix the dough as described in Dough Making Basics. Pour the water and starter into a mixing bowl; add the flour and salt, use your hands to stir till the flour is dampened then squeeze vigorously through your fingers until a dough is formed scraping down the bowl so that everything is incorporated; scrape the dough onto the work surface and knead ten times; rest for a few minutes then knead a further ten times; rest and knead for a third time.

Form into a rough ball, place in a lightly oiled bowl, cover. Allow to ferment for about four hours stretching each hour for the first three hours. This is not essential but will improve the dough structure.

Shaping

Cut the dough into 4 x 200g pieces (or if you are using the full campagne recipe 5 x 188g pieces). Pick up each dough piece and shape into a round, stretch slightly to elongate, place on a lightly floured surface and cover with a cloth. Allow the dough to relax for at least ten minutes.

Lightly flour the back of an area of work surface keeping the front of the work surface clear. The dough needs to grip the surface so that it can be shaped – too little flour and it will stick, too much and it will skid. You have to judge the stickiness of the dough and work on the edge of the floured surface to get the balance right.

Pick up a dough piece, stretch it slightly to elongate it a little further and drop it on the work surface seam side up. With your thumbs along the centre line, fold the dough towards you to just beyond the centre line. Seal the fold by pressing it firmly with the heel of your hand.

Turn the dough through 180 degrees so that the far side is now nearest you. Have your scraper to hand to free the dough if it sticks. Repeat the first step folding the far edge to just beyond the centre line and sealing with the heel of your hand.

Turn the dough over onto its seal. Place your hands, one on top of the other, in the centre of the now well-elongated dough and, pressing down quite firmly, roll the dough backwards and forwards on its seam whilst moving your hands apart towards the ends of the dough. Be firm but don't roll it out longer than your baking sheet.

Lay the baguettes, seam side up in an improvised couche.

Couches/Proving Cloths

A couche or proving cloth is simply a piece of material used to support a dough while it is proving in the same way that proving baskets are used to support round loaves.

The easiest way with these small baguettes is simply to use tea towels. Take a clean tea towel and lay it on your work surface with the far edge turned up a couple of inches against the back wall. Flour the strip of tea towel by the wall with rye flour.

Roll out your baguette and lay it, seam side up, on the floured strip against the wall and sprinkle with a little more rye. Then make a pleat in the cloth along the length of the baguette slightly higher than the dough so that it will not touch the next baguette when it is laid next to it. Flour the strip along the pleat, lay the second baguette along it and repeat.

You could also make up your couche on a tray or baking sheet so that it can be moved without disturbing the dough.



When your baguettes are all on the couche fold the ends of the cloth over the dough to provide support and protection and cover with plastic.



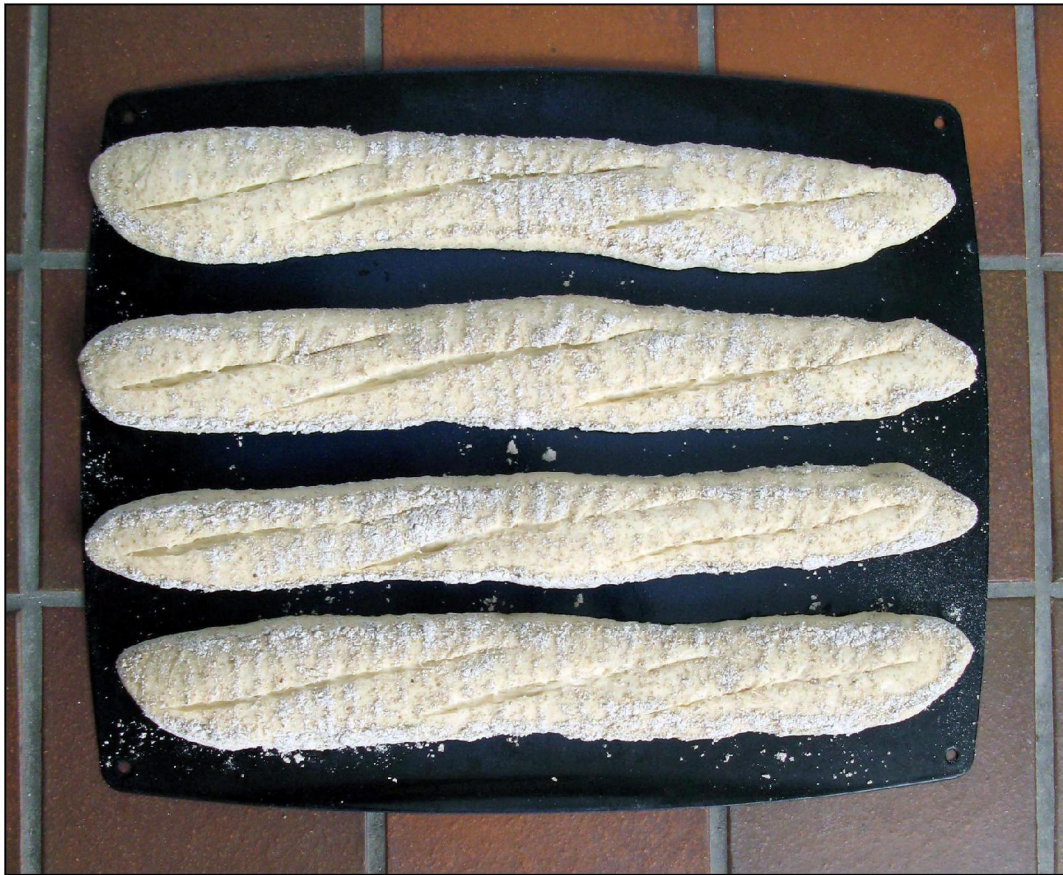
The proving time will be shorter than for larger loaves – between 1-2 hours. Start checking with the finger tip test after an hour.



Proved

Preheat the oven to 220C- 240C

Flour a baking sheet with rye flour. Move the baguettes to the baking sheet. Lift the pleat nearest you slightly so that the baguette rolls over so it is now seam side down. Lift it gently in both hands and lay it seam side down on the baking sheet. Repeat.



Make overlapping parallel slashes in the dough with a razor blade held at an angle. Straighten up the baguettes with a palette knife or other long straightedge.

Bake for about 20-25 minutes. Cool on a wire rack



Tomato Bread with Sundried Tomatoes



This is one of the loaves we used as a weekly special for customers virtually from the start of the microbakery because it was so popular.

The simple but very useful idea for this came from Rick Coldman, friend and baker at Mair's Bakehouse down in South Wales. To create a variation on a basic loaf, simply replace a third of the water in a recipe with tomato sauce or even just tinned tomatoes.

I deepened the flavour a little with the addition of a little rye and pushed it up market a bit by adding sun dried tomatoes. You can use quite a spicy tomato sauce because the flavours dissipate in the bread dough.

	Grams	%
Strong Bread Flour	349	75
Wholemeal Rye Flour	116	25
Water	212	45.5
Starter	130	28
Salt	7	1.6
Sundried Tomatoes (soaked)	31	6.6
Tomato Sauce	94	20.1
Dough Weight	940	
Loaf Weight	800	

Make and cool a tomato sauce. There's one with the pizza recipe later in the book but spice it up a little with celery seed and maybe a sprinkle of crushed chile.

Soak and dry the sun dried tomatoes. Cut into halve or thirds according to their size.

Mix the dough as described in Dough Making Basics. Pour the water, tomato sauce and starter into a mixing bowl; add the flour and salt, use your hands to stir till the flour is dampened then squeeze vigorously through your fingers until a dough is formed scraping down the bowl so that everything is incorporated; scrape the dough onto the work surface and knead ten times. Rest for a few minutes then knead a further ten times. Rest for a second time then flatten the dough into a rectangle and spread half of the sundried tomatoes over half of the dough area. Fold the other half of the dough over the sundried and press out again into a rectangle. Spread the remaining tomatoes over half of the surface and fold over the remaining dough. Fold the dough a few times to ensure an even distribution of the tomatoes. Then knead a further ten times.

Form into a rough ball, place in a lightly oiled bowl, cover. Allow to ferment for about four hours stretching each hour for the first three hours. This is not essential but will improve the dough structure.

Shaping

So far all our loaves have been shaped as boules. This loaf we will make as a bâtard which is a log shape. This starts as if you were making a round loaf.

Lightly sprinkle your work surface with a little strong bread flour.

Step 1: Place your dough on the work surface and press it out into a circle with your fingers. Lift the dough to make sure it's not sticking.

Step 2: Fold in the left and right edges of the top half of the circle.

Step 3: Fold the top edge down to just beyond the centre line and press firmly with the heel of your hand to seal.

Step 1



Step 2



Step 3

This is where the technique becomes different from making a boule:

Step 4: Turn the whole thing round so that the end nearest to you is now furthest away. Fold in the left and right edges.

Step 4



Step 5: Fold down the top edge to the centre line of the dough. Press to seal.

Step 5



Step 6



Step 6: Turn the dough round so that the end nearest to you is now furthest away. Fold down the top edge to the centre line of the dough. Press to seal.

Step 7: Turn the dough over onto its seam and roll it out like a baguette. Pinch together any parts of the seam that are not sealed.



Step 7

Improvise a couche as in the baguette recipe. Flour a tea towel with rye flour. Place the dough seam side up in the centre. Fold the sides of the tea towel over the dough. Use the back wall of your work surface to support one side of the dough and find something heavy to support the other side so that the dough doesn't spread too much. Cover with plastic sheet.

Cover and leave for 3½-4 hours checking with the finger tip test after 3 hours.

Preheat the oven to 210C. Uncover the dough, roll it onto its seam. Place the dough on a floured baking sheet and make overlapping parallel slashes on the diagonal with a blade held at an angle.

Bake for about 50 minutes; cool on a wire rack.



100% Russian Rye



Welcome to the fascinating world of rye bread. For this recipe, which I have learned from two bakers, Andrew Whitley of Bread Matters and Paul Merry of Panary, you will need a rye starter and a bread tin. You will also learn a new technique, wet shaping.

The bread tin is what is commonly known as a two pound bread tin. These vary in dimensions but, as an example, one I have here has base dimensions 19cm x 9cm and is 6.5 cm high.

Either make a complete new starter substituting wholemeal rye flour for wheat flour or take 50g of your wheat starter and refresh it with 100g water and 100g rye. Refresh it twice over a couple of days. Finally, 24 hours before mixing the dough make up the following refreshment using water that is barely warm – just take the cold off it:

	Grams	*%
Wholemeal Rye	128	34.3
Water	213	57.3
Starter	43	11.4

***% of the flour weight**

Don't be surprised that the starter is so wet compared with the wheat starters in the book.

	Grams	%
Light Rye	372	100
Water	186	50
Rye Starter	372	100
Salt	9	2.5
Dough Weight	940	
Loaf Weight	800	

Use wholemeal rye if you don't have light rye – sieve some of the bran out if you wish. Again use slightly tepid water.

Start off by mixing as you would with a wheat dough. Add the water and starter to a large mixing bowl, stir in the flour and salt with your hand and then as the dough comes together squeeze it through your fingers repeatedly until everything is incorporated. By now you will have discovered how sticky rye dough is. Scrape your hands clean with a plastic scraper.

Rye has a different sort of gluten to wheat and it doesn't develop like wheat gluten so there's no point in doing much kneading. Just cover the bowl and let it stand for up to an hour to allow the water to be fully absorbed and for fermentation to start.

Oil your bread tin. Fill a bowl with water and thoroughly wet your hands and your dough scraper. Scoop out the dough into your wet hands and squeeze it one way and the other to remove any air bubbles. Squeeze it to roughly the shape of your tin and drop the dough in. Smooth the top with a wet spatula. The whole thing will look very unpromising – but do not fear.

Cover the tin with a bit of oiled cling film and prove for about 3½ hours – be guided by what you see. After about two hours you will be thinking disaster. But gradually it will stir itself. It will only rise half to three quarters of an inch but that's enough.

Preheat the oven to about 240C. Bake for 15 minutes then reduce the temperature to 180C and bake for a further 45 minutes. Turn off the oven. Remove the bread from the tin and return to the cooling oven for 20-30 minutes with the door wedged slightly open.



Cool completely on a wire rack. Wrap in greaseproof paper/clingfilm/freezer bag and leave at least until the following day. The flavours of rye develop as it ages – even in the freezer.

To make Borodinski, add a little ground coriander to the dough and sprinkle a few coriander seeds in the base of the bread tin – little flavour bombs waiting to explode when you bite into them.



Parmesan & Courgette Flatbread



The idea (and flavour combinations) for this flatbread came from Mark Miller's Flavored Breads, recipes from the Coyote Café, Santa Fe. The savoury smells drifting from your oven mean this is a bread that doesn't last long after the timer's ping.

	Grams	%
Strong Bread Flour	131	72.2
Semolina	34	18.5
Wholemeal Wheat Flour	17	9.2
Water	126	69.4
Starter	143	78.7
Salt	3	1.8
Courgettes	77	42.4
Grated Parmesan	39	21.2
Dough Weight	570	
Loaf Weight	500	

Grate the courgette and parmesan.

This is a dough that starts off wet and becomes wetter because of the moisture in the courgettes. Fear not. The mixing and kneading can take place in the bowl using plastic scrapers.

Pour the water and starter into your mixing bowl and, using a plastic scraper, stir in all of the other ingredients except the courgettes. Allow to stand for ten minutes, then knead the dough in the bowl using two plastic scrapers pushing the dough away from you with one scraper while pulling back towards you with the other. Do this for about a minute.

Rest for ten minutes then repeat.

Rest a third time. Add the courgettes and knead gently into the dough.

Oil a second bowl and scrape the dough into it. Cover and allow to ferment for 3-4 hours.

Have a bowl with flour in handy for flouring the work surface and your hands (it is always useful to have a bowl of flour available when you're baking).

Oil a pizza tin or a baking sheet. Flour an area of work surface and scrape the dough out onto it. Flour your hands and your scraper.

Working quickly, pick up the dough, very roughly shape it into a round and drop it onto the centre of the pizza tin. Pat it down a little.

Cover with an upturned bowl and prove for an hour.

Oil your hands and press out the dough into a circle about 1cm thick. Cover again for 1-1½ hours.

Preheat the oven to 240C. Pour a little oil into a shallow dish. Dip your fingers in the oil and dimple the dough with them to stop it rising too much when it hits the oven heat.

Bake for 20-25 minutes.

Cool on a wire rack. See if you can resist eating it straight away.

Brioche au fromage de brebis aux figues



This is what is known as a Poor Man's Brioche – an enriched dough with butter and eggs but no where near as rich as the French classic. If you can't find any other sort of sheep's cheese Feta will do fine.

	Grams	%
Strong Bread Flour	343	100
Full Cream Milk	86	25
Starter	172	50
Butter	86	25
Eggs	77	22.5
Salt	5	1.5
Sheeps Cheese	86	25
Dried Figs	86	25
Dough Weight	940	
Loaf Weight	800	

(A medium egg weighs about 55g – save the yolk of the second egg for egg wash)

Melt the butter. Cube the cheese and halve the figs.

Mix the dough as described in Dough Making Basics. Stir together the milk, starter, melted butter and egg in a mixing bowl; add the flour and salt, use your hands to stir till the flour is

dampened then squeeze vigorously through your fingers until a dough is formed scraping down the bowl so that everything is incorporated; scrape the dough onto the work surface and knead ten times; rest for a few minutes then knead a further ten times; rest and fold in the cheese and figs before kneading for a third time. Try to keep the cheese cubes as intact as possible

Form into a rough ball, place in a lightly oiled bowl, cover. Allow to ferment for about four hours stretching each hour for the first three hours. This is not essential but will improve the dough structure.

Oil a bread tin. Lightly flour your work surface and turn out the dough onto it. Stretch and press the dough out into a sort of rectangle: the near edge should be a little shorter than your bread tin and the far edge a little less wide than the near one.

Lay your thumbs along the far edge and roll the dough up into a cylinder towards you as tightly as you can manage with a soft dough such as this. Tuck the ends under slightly and roll the dough backwards and forwards on its seam to seal it. Drop the dough seam side down into the tin. Oil a piece of cling film and cover the tin.

Allow to prove for three to four hours. The one advantage of using a bread tin is that you can see when the dough has risen appreciably.

Preheat the oven to 210C.

Make an egg wash with the yolk of an egg and a drop of milk. Brush the top of the loaf with the egg wash and again half way through baking.

Bake for about 50 minutes in total reducing the temperature to 180C after 15 minutes.

Remove from the tin and cool on a wire rack.

Pizza



The beauty of this recipe is that you can mix the dough, use what you want, and put the remainder in the fridge where it will stay usable for at least five days.

	Grams	%
Strong Bread Flour	640	100
Water	333	52
Starter	179	28
Salt	10	1.6
Olive Oil	38	6
Dough Weight (6 x 200g bases)	1200	

Mix the dough as described in Dough Making Basics. Pour the water, olive oil and starter into a mixing bowl; add the flour and salt, use your hands to stir till the flour is dampened then squeeze vigorously through your fingers until a dough is formed scraping down the bowl so that everything is incorporated; scrape the dough onto the work surface and knead ten times; rest for a few minutes then knead a further ten times; rest and knead for a third time.

Form into a rough ball, place in a lightly oiled bowl, cover. Allow to ferment for about four hours stretching each hour for the first three hours. This is not essential but will improve the dough structure.

If the dough is for use later in the week, it can go in the fridge at this point. If you are using all or part of it today prove all or the remainder for another three hours.

The amount of dough per pizza is a personal matter. 150g will give you a thin crust for a 24cm

pizza but you might want to go up to 200g or beyond.

Oil a pizza tin or baking sheet. Shape the dough into a rough round, then press it out to size. You might have to do this in a couple of stages allowing the dough to rest a while before it will stretch to size.

Preheat the oven to as hot as you can get it.

Spread the dough with a thin layer of tomato sauce, add the toppings and bake.

Timings depend absolutely on your oven. My current electric fan oven will bake them in 10 minutes whereas in my previous gas oven they would take 20.

Basic Tomato Sauce

Everyone knows how to make a tomato sauce but here's a simple one anyway.

Chop an onion finely and fry gently in olive oil with a little salt. After a few minutes add a couple of crushed and chopped cloves of garlic. When they are soft tip in a tin of tomatoes and break them up with a wooden spoon if they are not pre-chopped. Add plenty of black pepper and stalks of parsley or celery leaves or dried herbs to flavour. Simmer partly covered until the sauce thickens.

One Topping to get you Started



(Yes, I am weak about eggs on pizza)

There is something quite wicked about the taste of caramelised leeks.

Cut a couple of leeks into 2.5cm slices. Heat a frying pan wide enough to hold the slices in a single layer. When really hot add olive oil and the leeks then cover with a lid.

Don't forget the leeks get cooked a second time in the oven – what you are trying to do is to brown them well and soften them without creating a mush.

After a couple of minutes remove the lid and turn over the leeks and cook for a minute or two. Cool on a plate.

Wash and quarter some mushrooms and give them a quick blast in the same pan to remove some of the liquid.

Spread the pizza dough with a thin layer of tomato sauce. Arrange the leeks and mushrooms on the sauce plus a few slices of mozzarella plus maybe a sprinkle of crushed chiles.

If you go for the egg option, about four minutes before your pizza is done, remove from the oven, make a depression in the centre with a serving spoon and crack the egg into the depression.

Remove from the oven the instant the egg is done to your satisfaction.

Wheat Tortillas

Yeah, I know this is cheating. I have found one Mexican yeasted recipe but generally wheat tortillas are unleavened.

Here a sourdough starter is included to add flavour rather than raise the dough. For that reason the starter doesn't have to be very active.

	Grams	%
Strong Bread Flour	400	80
Wholemeal Wheat Flour	100	20
Water	200	40
Starter	100	20
Butter	75	15
Salt	5	1
Dough Weight (14 x 60g tortillas)	880	

I prefer rye starter but wheat will do.

Mix together the flours and salt. Cube the butter and rub into the flours. The water should be "quite" hot – no need to worry about the survival of the yeasts in your starter in this instance. Stir the water and starter into the flours to form a dough and knead a few times – again gluten development is not particularly important with this dough. Allow the dough to rest for an hour or so, covered.

This amount of dough will give you about 14 x 20cm tortillas. So either weigh out the dough at 60g a time or pull off walnut-sized pieces and roll out very thinly on a floured surface.

Place a heavy frying pan over a medium heat and dry fry the tortillas. When the first side starts to produce bubbles flip the tortilla over and fry briefly pressing it down with a spatula. Stack the tortillas on a plate covered with a tea towel.

My technique is to roll out three or more, put the first one in the pan and roll out another one while the first one is cooking. You can adjust the heat so that the first side is ready to be turned by the time you have rolled out the next tortilla.

If you're not using them straight away, these tortillas freeze well. They can be reheated either by dry frying and stacking again or wrap them in tin foil, place in a casserole and warm in a medium oven.

Tortilla chips (totopos) are usually made from corn tortillas but you can cut wheat tortillas into segments and deep fry them or fry whole ones for tostados.

If you don't want to fry them they can be made crisp in the oven so long as you watch them carefully.

Your First Mexican Feast

These enchiladas stuffed with Rajas de Chile Poblano are great for an informal dinner with friends who assemble their own at the table from an array of ingredients – have plenty of kitchen roll on hand.

Rajas de Chile Poblano: In the UK you will be lucky to have a source of fresh poblanos (it is getting better) although you may find them on the net. Substitute green and red peppers and add jalapenos for a little heat – it is probably advisable to keep the heat down in this dish and to have a very hot sauce on the table so that your guests can crank it up as they wish.

For about four people: Chop a large onion, not too finely, and fry it gently in vegetable oil with a little salt. Chop about four peppers and add them to the onions when they have started to soften. Chop jalapenos to taste and a bunch of coriander and add to the mixture. When the peppers have softened a little add a couple of tablespoons of water and similar of tomato puree. Cover and simmer but remove from the heat before everything gets too soft.

Guacamole: Chop a little onion, jalapenos, coriander and a skinned tomato. Mix in a bowl with fresh lime juice, a splash of olive oil, salt and pepper. Mash a ripe avocado – the easiest way of doing this is to halve it lengthways, remove the stone, and then, with a half in the palm of your hand, mash the flesh with a fork with the skin still on and scrape out into the bowl with the other ingredients. Stir but do not make too smooth.

Hot Stuff: Chop a little onion, two scotch bonnets, coriander and skinned tomato. The amounts should be roughly equal. Mix in equal quantities of orange and lime juice – just enough to make a sauce. Season with salt and pepper. Warn your guests.

Quick Pickled Onions: Slice a couple of red onions into rings. Place in a small saucepan and cover with white wine or cider vinegar. Bring to the boil. Allow to cool in the liquid. Drain. Alternatively serve raw chopped onion.

Soured Cream: If soured cream is not available make your own by stirring a little lime juice into double or whipping cream.

Cheese: Grate a bowl of cheddar.

Lettuce: Finely shred a romaine or other crisp lettuce.

You might want to serve with rice and beans but these enchiladas are rather filling and a whole dinner plate is advisable for the self-assembly.

Warm the tortillas if made some time before. Allow three per person (some guests probably won't exceed two which allows for those struggling through four). The rajas should be hot.

Arrange the tortillas, rajas, guacamole, hot chile sauce, onion, soured cream, grated cheese and shredded lettuce on the table together with serving spoons.

Warn you guests to be sparing with quantities or they will make an awful mess.

Self-Assembly: Spread a strip of shredded lettuce along the centre line of the tortilla; cover

this with the rajas and sprinkle with cheese. After this add a little of some or all of the remaining ingredients. Roll up and eat with your fingers. Can be amusing - it certainly breaks the ice.

Keep the remaining tortillas wrapped so that they stay warm and don't dry out.

And finally, just to make sure I’m not selling under-weight, a thirteenth recipe to complete a baker’s dozen.

Red Grape and Fennel Seed Focaccia



One of those beguiling flavour combinations balancing sweet and sour. A salted dough, lightly caramelised grapes plus the unusual counterpoint flavour of aniseed from the fennel.

	Grams	%
Strong Bread Flour	179	91.7
Wholemeal Wheat Flour	16	8.2
Water	120	61.5
Starter	52	26.7
Salt	3	1.5
Red Grapes	200	102.6
Fennel Seed		
Sugar		
Dough Weight (370g+200g grapes)	570	
Loaf Weight	500	

Mix the dough as described in Dough Making Basics keeping the grapes to one side. Pour the water and starter into a mixing bowl; add the flour and salt, use your hands to stir till the flour is dampened then squeeze vigorously through your fingers until a dough is formed scraping down the bowl so that everything is incorporated; scrape the dough onto the work surface and knead ten times; rest for a few minutes then knead a further ten times; rest and knead for a third time.

Form into a rough ball, place in a lightly oiled bowl, cover. Allow to ferment for about four hours stretching each hour for the first three hours. This is not essential but will improve the dough structure.

Oil a pizza tin or a baking sheet. Roughly shape the dough into a round and drop it onto the centre of the pizza tin. Pat it down a little. Cover with an upturned bowl and prove for an hour.

Oil your hands and press out the dough into a circle about 25cm in diameter. Cover again for 1-1½ hours.

Preheat the oven to 240C.

Halve the grapes lengthwise and stud the dough with them cut side down pressing them well into the dough. Sprinkle with fennel seed and a little sugar. Drizzle with olive oil.

Bake for 20-25 minutes.



Next Steps

If you are new to baking, to start off with you are likely to produce what some people call “flying saucers” or “cowpats”, i.e. loaves that don’t rise very much (even though they taste great). Happens to everyone. Could be your starter is not active enough. The most likely cause is lack of structure in your dough. Folding during fermentation will help but beginners don’t realize the amount of force that should be put into shaping. You really need to use your muscles especially with the comparatively low hydration doughs in this book. Just think, after shaping, these doughs have upwards of 3½ hours to recover and re-gas. Persevere – it’s the only cure.

Repeat!!! If you want to be a good baker you need to bake regularly and to fill your oven as much as you can. Full ovens bake better. You have friends and neighbours who will be more than grateful to take your bread, even to pay you. Where else can you get good sourdough? But follow the guidelines in this book until you feel confident about what you are doing.

Don’t worry about your starter, just take care of it. You’ll be repaid with a lifetime of bread.

Watch out for the next in **thePartisanbaker** series where things start to become a little more unorthodox

Think big:



Six kilo Pain de Campagne, anyone?



Sourdough

**your guidebook to the world of
Naturally Leavened Bread**

**Online support at:
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