

Whe-wa-sa Bread

(aka Old World Bread – made *solely* from wheat, water, & salt.)

The Starter

Start with approximately ¼ cup whole-wheat flour (from red or white HARD wheat) and a little more than ¼ cup water. The starter should be similar to a thin pancake batter, but not watery. Watery batter won't work. **DO NOT COVER. IMPORTANT...**Use non-chlorinated water for starter. If all you have is tap water that has been treated with chlorine...set some in the sun for a few hours or overnight in a glass container.

Place the starter in a non-metal container in a warm spot. Not hot, just warm. (A microwave with the night light turned on underneath makes a great warmer.)

Within a few hours, perhaps even a day, the batter should start to smell a little sour and start to get bubbly. It may have a slight soft crust on top, as well. Just stir that in, in the sponge step. **IMPORTANT...**If the batter has an offensively foul smell...trash it and start over. No big deal...it happens sometimes.

Once the starter bubbles it can be stored in the refrigerator in a covered, non-metal container, for a couple of months without having to “feed” it. The top of it may get a little dark or a layer of dark (gray to black) liquid may develop on top. That **DOES NOT** mean the starter has gone bad. It's a natural occurring part of the process. You can either just stir it in or pour it off.

The Sponge

Method #1 Stir ALL of the starter into 1 Cup of whole wheat flour and enough warm water so that the batter resembles pancake batter. (Not thin batter this time, though.) Place the sponge in a warm spot. Within a few hours, (or could be left over night) the sponge will double, perhaps even triple, in size. If it reached it's peak and it slumped back *a little*, that's OK, but if it slumped all the way back, to the point that it is runny, your bread will be more sour, like traditional sour dough, and it will be heavier, and somewhat moist and chewy. If that happens to your sponge, give it a vigorous stir and add enough flour and warm water to make the “pancake batter” again, and let it rise again for a little while.

Method #2 Stir a little over one tablespoon of warm water into one tablespoon of whole wheat flour. Again, this should be similar to pancake batter, but not thin batter. (Add a few drops of water if necessary.) Stir in a dab of the starter that's about the size of a good sized jelly bean. Set it in a warm spot. When it gets bubbly, you will then have *fresh* starter. Stir it into 1/4th cup flour and enough warm water to resemble pancake batter. When it gets bubbly proceed with the steps in Method #1 using this fresh starter and saving your original starter, aka the *mother starter*. (I prefer this method, even though it takes a bit more time for the extra step. This way you'll always be starting with a *fresh* starter.)

IMPORTANT...The sponge must be made entirely from wheat flour to develop the gluten.

STOP...Always Remember...

Before making the dough...if you used Method #1 to develop the sponge:

Save about ¼ cup of the sponge to be stored for your next batch of bread.

If you use Method #2 to develop the sponge...**you will eventually run out of the original *mother starter* and will need to eventually save some of the sponge for a new batch of *mother starter*.**

IMPORTANT...Always save-out some of the sponge **BEFORE** adding the salt.

The Dough

At this point you can add flours other than wheat, as well as seeds, oatmeal, or sprouts. However, adding anything other than wheat will make the bread heavier. That's OK, breads don't always need to be light to be good. Adding other flours, seeds and/or sprouts also adds a greater variety of nutrients. Try rye with caraway seeds, cinnamon with raisins, ground anise, etc.

Stir the sponge into 6 cups of flour, 2 teaspoons salt, and enough warm water to make a soft dough. (Just a little more than 2 cups.) You don't want it to be too soft though, or you won't be able to knead it and it won't hold its shape. **IMPORTANT...** Don't forget the salt.

Knead the dough until springy. Form into 2 loaves and place into greased loaf pans or onto a floured or cornmeal covered baking stone.

Rising & Baking

Depending on the room temperature, the bread will take 3-4 hours to raise sitting out on the counter. (Only one rise...NO punching down.)

You can "push" the raising time by preheating the oven for just a few minutes while you are kneading the dough. **MAKE SURE TO TURN THE OVEN OFF AFTER 2 MINUTES. Set a timer!** After warming the oven, put the loaves in and cover with a damp cloth for the first hour. The bread will raise in 1½ to 2 hours this way.

Preheat the oven with the loaves in the oven to give the dough one final kick. It makes for lighter breads.

Bake at 375° F for 50 – 60 minutes. Allow bread to thoroughly cool before bagging.

NOTE...For long term storage...the starter can be dried in a dehydrator set on a low temperature until thoroughly dry, ground into powder, bottled or bagged in an airtight container, and stored in a cool dark place. Make a double or triple batch of the sponge and dry a bunch to save and/or share. To reconstitute: Mix a teaspoon of powdered starter with a Tablespoon of flour and enough warm water to resemble pancake batter.