

The First Loaf Sourdough Planner

A calm starter routine, a weekend baking timeline
and the notes that make loaf two better than loaf one.

STARTER · SCHEDULE · BAKE · TROUBLESHOOT

A baking routine + six printable worksheets

STUDIO SAMPLE · GENERAL HOME-BAKING GUIDANCE



Your first good loaf is a schedule, not a secret.

Most first loaves fail on timing and temperature, not on skill. This planner gives you a starter routine you can keep and a weekend timeline you can follow.

King Arthur Baking's advice is reassuringly plain: a starter is ready when it reliably doubles within about 6 to 8 hours of a feeding, and a mature starter is hard to kill. [1][3] Bread follows the same logic. Feed on time, watch the dough rather than the clock, and write down what happened, so the next bake starts from what you learned.



By the end, you will have...

A living starter and a feeding log, a weekend baking timeline that fits your kitchen, a base recipe you can repeat, a bake log, a crumb scorecard and a troubleshooting sheet in your own words.

How to use this edition

Read pages 4-8 to get your starter going. Pages 9-16 walk through one baking weekend. Pages 17-23 cover fixes, flavour and a worked example. Print the worksheets on pages 24-29 and keep the summary on page 30.

A STUDIO SAMPLE, READ THIS FIRST

Created by Forgewick in September 2026 to show the quality of our ebook work. It is general home-baking guidance: kitchens, flours and ovens differ, so treat every timing as a starting point. A partner edition is built from the creator's own method, recipes and the questions their audience asks.

Four sections. One loaf you are proud of.

Follow the whole guide, or tap a section to go straight to what you need today.

01 **Meet your starter** **04**
Making, feeding, reading and storing a starter.

02 **The baking weekend** **09**
Equipment, the base recipe and an hour-by-hour timeline.

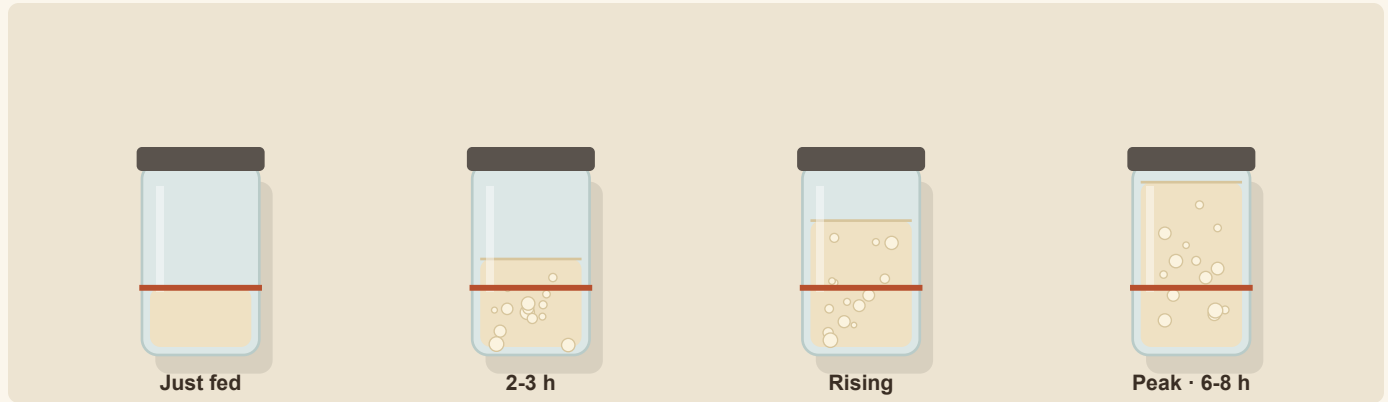
03 **Fix and improve** **17**
Troubleshooting, flavour, flour and a worked weekend.

04 **Keep the useful tools** **24**
Six printable worksheets and a one-page summary.

The goal is not a bakery loaf on day one. It is a loaf you can repeat, and a routine you can keep.

What a starter is, and what it needs.

Flour, water, time and a warm-ish spot. That is the whole list.



A sourdough starter is a small culture of wild yeast and friendly bacteria living in a paste of flour and water. Fed regularly, it rises and falls in a rhythm you can learn to read. Yeast makes the gas that lifts your bread; bacteria make the acids that give sourdough its flavour and keeping quality.

01 Keep it warm-ish

A comfortable room temperature, around 70°F (21°C), suits it well; a little warmer speeds it up, cooler slows it down. [3]

02 Feed it on a rhythm

Daily at room temperature, or weekly in the fridge. Page 6 has both routines. [2]

03 Watch, then bake

Ready means it doubles in about 6 to 8 hours after a feeding. [1]

Making a starter from scratch.

About five days, one small jar, and a kitchen scale. Adapted from King Arthur Baking. [1]

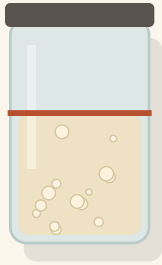
Day	What to do	What you should see
1	Mix 50g whole wheat (or rye) flour with 50g cool water in a clean jar. Cover loosely; leave at warm room temperature.	Not much. Maybe a bubble or two by evening.
2	Discard all but 50g. Feed with 50g water + 50g all-purpose flour.	A few bubbles; a faint fruity or sour smell.
3-5	Feed twice a day, about 12 hours apart, keeping 50g each time and adding 50g water + 50g flour.	More bubbles each day; rises higher and faster after each feed.
5+	Keep feeding until it at least doubles within about 6-8 hours of a feed.	Doubles, smells pleasantly tangy, bubbles all through. Ready.

WHY DISCARD?

Keeping only 50g before each feed keeps the ratio of fresh flour high, so the culture stays vigorous and the jar stays a manageable size. Save the discard for pancakes, waffles or flatbread rather than binning it. [2]

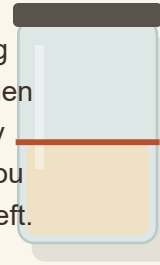
Two feeding routines. Pick one.

Room temperature if you bake often; the fridge if you bake at weekends. [2]



Room temperature: daily

Once every 24 hours, keep 50g of starter, discard the rest and add 50g water and 50g all-purpose flour. When it has roughly doubled and is bubbly (about 6-8 hours later), take what you need for a recipe and feed what is left.



Refrigerator: weekly

Feed about once a week. Two or three feedings before baking day, take it out and feed every 12 hours until it doubles or triples within 6-8 hours. Then it is ready.

Both routines work. The refrigerator routine simply means planning your bake a day or two ahead, so the starter can wake up before it has to do any lifting.

01 Same jar, same time

Keep the jar in the same spot and feed at roughly the same time; a rhythm makes it easy to read.

02 Mark the level

Put a rubber band at the level just after feeding, so you can see how far it has risen.

03 Log it

Worksheet 1 is a feeding log: time, ratio, room temperature and how high it rose.

Reading your starter.

What the bubbles, the smell and the liquid on top are telling you.

You notice	What it means	What to do
Doubled, domed top, bubbly	Peak activity: this is when it lifts bread best. [1]	Use it now, or feed it to keep the rhythm.
Risen then fallen, sunken top	It has passed its peak and is hungry.	Feed it; bake with it next time it peaks.
Thin grey or brown liquid on top	“Hooch”: alcohol and water from hungry yeast. Not spoilage. [4]	Stir in or pour off, then feed. Feed a little more often.
Pink or orange tint or streak, or fuzzy mould	Bad bacteria or mould have taken over. [3][4]	Throw it out, wash the jar, start again.
Sluggish after a missed feed or a cold spell	A mature starter is hardy; it is just slow. [3]	Two or three warm feedings usually revive it.

Stainless steel spoons and bowls are fine; the old warning about metal is a myth. [3]

Starter housekeeping.

Small habits that keep the jar clean and the culture strong.

01 Keep the jar clean

Every few feeds, move the starter to a clean jar so dried crusts on the walls do not grow mould. [3]

02 Weigh, don't scoop

A scale makes every feed the same, so changes you see are real. [1]

03 Keep a discard jar in the fridge

Use it within a week or so for pancakes, waffles, crackers or pizza dough. [2]

04 Going away?

Feed it, then refrigerate. One or two feeds when you are back brings it round. [2][3]

05 Name it if you like

People who name their starter tend to feed it on time. That is the whole science of it.



Equipment: less than you think.

A scale and a lidded pot do most of the work. Everything else is nice to have.



Item	Why it matters	If you don't have it
Digital scale	Sourdough is ratios; grams make it repeatable.	Borrow one before the first bake. It is the one essential.
Large bowl + cover	Mixing and bulk fermentation.	A tea towel or plate as a cover works.
Lidded heavy pot (Dutch oven)	Traps steam for an open crumb and a crisp crust. [5]	A heavy tray plus an upturned oven-safe bowl.
Banneton or bowl + tea towel	Holds the shaped dough while it proves.	A bowl lined with a floured tea towel.
Razor or sharp knife	Scoring lets the loaf open where you want.	A very sharp serrated knife.
Thermometer	Tells you the dough and the loaf are done, not just the clock. [5]	Tap the base: a hollow sound is a good sign.

The base recipe: one loaf.

A forgiving 70% hydration dough. Weigh everything.

Ingredient	Amount	Baker's %	Notes
Bread flour (strong white)	450 g	90%	Higher protein gives a stronger, more forgiving dough.
Whole wheat flour	50 g	10%	Flavour and a livelier ferment.
Water	350 g	70%	Lukewarm, so the dough lands near 75-78°F (24-26°C). [5]
Ripe starter (at peak)	100 g	20%	Doubled within the last few hours. [1]
Fine salt	10 g	2%	Added after the flour has soaked.

Baker's percentages express every ingredient as a share of the total flour (500 g). They make it easy to scale up or change hydration later. Beginners do well at 70%: wet enough for an open crumb, dry enough to shape.

TEMPERATURE IS AN INGREDIENT

Dough at about 75-78°F (24-26°C) ferments in roughly the times on the next pages. A cold kitchen can double the bulk time; a hot one can halve it. Log the room temperature on Worksheet 3 every bake. [5]

The timeline at a glance.

One weekend, two mornings. Adjust the clock to your kitchen. Adapted from The Perfect Loaf’s beginner schedule. [5]



When	Stage	How long
Fri evening or Sat 8 am	Feed the starter so it peaks at mix time	5-8 h
Sat 12 pm	Autolyse: flour and water rest	1 h
Sat 1 pm	Mix in starter and salt	10 min
Sat 1-5 pm	Bulk fermentation with 3 sets of stretch and folds	About 4 h at 74-76°F
Sat 5 pm	Preshape, rest 25 min, shape, into the banneton	40 min
Sat 5:40 pm → Sun 9 am	Cold proof in the fridge	About 16 h
Sun 8 am	Heat the oven and pot to 450°F (232°C)	1 h
Sun 9 am	Bake: 20 min lid on, then 25-30 min lid off	45-50 min
Sun 10 am	Cool on a rack before slicing	1-2 h

Saturday: mix and build strength.

Gentle hands, warm dough and folds every half hour.

01 Autolyse (12 pm)

Mix the flours with 330g of the water until no dry flour remains. Cover and rest 1 hour. This lets the flour hydrate and makes the dough easier to handle. [5]

02 Mix (1 pm)

Add the 100g ripe starter and the salt with the last 20g of water. Squeeze and fold in the bowl for 3-5 minutes until it comes together. Note the dough temperature if you can.

03 Bulk fermentation (1-5 pm)

Cover and keep warm. At 30, 60 and 90 minutes, do a set of stretch and folds: lift one side, stretch up, fold over; turn the bowl and repeat four times. Then leave it alone. [5]

04 Know when bulk is done

The dough has grown by roughly half or more, has a domed, bubbly surface, jiggles when the bowl is shaken and pulls away from the sides. Time is a guide; these signs decide.



mixed



after folds



end of bulk

Saturday evening: shape and chill.

Shaping builds the skin that holds the loaf up. The fridge does the rest overnight.

01 Preshape (5 pm)

Tip the dough onto a lightly floured counter. Fold the edges to the centre to make a loose round. Rest 25 minutes uncovered so the surface firms up slightly. [5]

02 Shape

Flip the round, fold the bottom third up, the sides in, then roll from the top down to make a tight ball. Drag it towards you on the counter to tighten the skin.

03 Into the banneton

Flour the banneton (or towel-lined bowl) well. Place the dough seam side up. Cover with a bag or shower cap.

04 Cold proof (overnight)

Refrigerate at about 38°F (3°C) for around 16 hours. Cold slows the yeast, deepens flavour and makes the dough firm enough to score cleanly in the morning. [5]



seam side up, well floured

Sunday: bake.

A very hot pot, a confident score and the patience to let it cool.

01 Heat (8 am)

Put the lidded pot in the oven and heat to 450°F (232°C) for a full hour. A properly hot pot gives the burst of oven spring you want. [5]

02 Turn out and score

Tip the cold dough onto parchment. Score one long curved cut about a quarter-inch deep, blade at a low angle. Do it in one movement.

03 Bake covered (20 min)

Lower the dough into the pot with the parchment. Lid on. The trapped steam keeps the crust soft while the loaf expands. [5]

04 Bake uncovered (25-30 min)

Remove the lid and bake until deep brown. Done means an internal temperature around 208°F (97°C), or a hollow sound when you tap the base. [5]

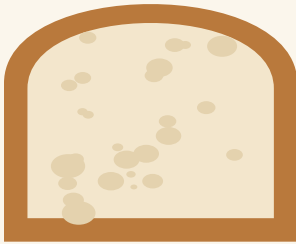
05 Cool (1-2 h)

The crumb is still setting as steam escapes. Cutting early gives a gummy slice. Wait. [5]



Slice, store and enjoy.

What a good first loaf looks like, and how to keep it.



A good first loaf has a crisp, deep-brown crust, an open but even crumb, and a pleasant tang. If it is a little dense or flat, that is normal: pages 18-19 tell you exactly what to change next time. Score it on Worksheet 4 while it is fresh in your mind.

01 Day 1-2

Cut side down on a board, uncovered or under a tea towel. The crust stays crisp.

02 Day 3-5

Bread bag or wrapped; toast slices. Sourdough keeps better than most breads thanks to its acidity.

03 Longer

Slice and freeze; toast from frozen.

Fitting the timeline to your week.

The stages are fixed. The clock is not.

If you...	Then...
Work weekdays	Feed Friday evening, mix Saturday midday, bake Sunday morning (the schedule on page 11).
Have a cold kitchen (below 70°F)	Expect bulk to take 5-7 hours. Find a warmer spot: the oven with only the light on, or near (not on) a radiator.
Have a warm kitchen (above 78°F)	Bulk may finish in 2.5-3 hours. Watch the dough, not the clock; use cooler water next time.
Only have evenings	Mix at 6 pm, fold until 7:30 pm, let bulk finish by 10-11 pm, shape, and cold proof until the next evening. A longer cold proof (up to 24 h) is fine.
Want a same-day loaf	Skip the cold proof: after shaping, prove at room temperature 1-2 hours until puffy, then bake. Scoring is harder; flavour is milder.

Write the plan you actually used on Worksheet 2, then the times it really took on Worksheet 3. After three bakes you will have your own schedule.

When something goes wrong.

Change one thing per bake, so you know what fixed it.

You notice	Most likely cause	Try next time
Dense, tight crumb; little rise	Starter was not at peak, or bulk was too short. [1]	Bake only when the starter has doubled; extend bulk until the dough is domed and jiggly.
Flat, spreading loaf	Over-proofed, or shaping too loose.	Shorten bulk in a warm kitchen; build more tension when shaping.
Gummy, wet crumb	Under-baked or cut too soon. [5]	Bake to about 208°F internal; cool 1-2 hours.
Pale, soft crust	Oven or pot not hot enough; too long with the lid on.	Preheat a full hour; take the lid off at 20 minutes.
Big holes near the crust, tight below	Uneven shaping or under-fermented dough.	Degas gently at preshape; give bulk a little longer.
Too sour	Long, cool ferments and a hungry starter build acid.	Use starter at peak; shorten the cold proof.
Not sour enough	Young starter; short fermentation.	Lengthen the cold proof; add a little whole wheat or rye.

Under-proofed or over-proofed?

The single most useful judgement in sourdough. Here is how to tell.

Under-proofed

Tight, dense crumb with a few big tunnels, often a pale, blown-out score, and a dough that felt firm and springy at shaping. The fix is more time or more warmth in bulk, and a starter that is truly at peak. [1]

Over-proofed

A flat loaf, a crumb that is open but even and slightly gummy, a dough that was slack and sticky and tore when scored. The fix is a shorter bulk, a cooler kitchen or water, and a tighter shape.

The poke test helps: flour a finger and press the shaped dough about half an inch. Springs back fast: under-proofed. Springs back slowly and leaves a small dent: ready. Does not spring back: over-proofed, bake it now.

TEMPERATURE EXPLAINS MOST OF IT

Every 5-10°F change in dough temperature noticeably changes fermentation speed. Two identical recipes in two kitchens will not take the same time. This is why Worksheet 3 asks for the room and dough temperature every bake. [5]

Flour, water and flavour.

Small changes with big effects. Introduce them one at a time.

01 Bread flour first

Strong white flour has the protein for an easy, stretchy dough. Master it before moving to weaker or wholegrain flours.

02 Add wholegrain gradually

Whole wheat and rye bring flavour and speed up fermentation, but absorb more water and give a tighter crumb. Try 10%, then 20%.

03 Raise hydration slowly

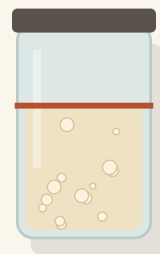
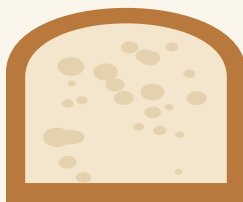
From 70% to 72% to 75%, one bake at a time. Wetter dough means a more open crumb and stickier handling. [5]

04 Adjust sourness with time and temperature

A longer, cooler proof builds tang; a shorter, warmer one keeps it mild.

05 Keep the salt at 2%

It seasons the loaf and controls the ferment. Do not skip it.



What to do with discard.

The starter you would have thrown away is the start of dinner. [2]

Idea	How
Pancakes or waffles	Stir 100-200g discard into your usual batter; reduce flour and liquid a little to match.
Crackers	Mix discard with a little oil, salt and herbs to a spreadable paste; spread thin, bake until crisp.
Flatbread or pizza base	Discard plus flour, water, salt and a pinch of yeast for a quick, tangy dough.
Quick banana or courgette bread	Replace some of the flour and liquid with discard for extra depth.

Discard kept in a covered jar in the fridge is good for about a week. It will not rise bread on its own, but it adds flavour and tenderness to almost anything with a batter. Plan the week's discard on Worksheet 6.

SAFETY NOTE

Discard is only as good as the starter it came from. If the starter showed pink or orange streaks or fuzzy mould, the discard goes too. [3][4]

A worked weekend.

A fictional example of the routine in a normal kitchen. Adapt it; do not copy it.

When	What happens	Worksheet
Friday 8 pm	Takes the starter from the fridge; feeds it 50/50/50. Kitchen at 68°F.	1
Saturday 8 am	Feeds again; by 1 pm it has doubled with a domed top.	1
Saturday 12-5:30 pm	Autolyse, mix, three sets of folds. Cold kitchen: bulk runs 4.5 hours before the dough is domed and jiggly.	2, 3
Saturday 6 pm	Shapes, into the banneton, into the fridge.	3
Sunday 9 am	Bakes 20 + 28 minutes; internal temperature 207°F. Cools until 11.	3
Sunday lunch	Crumb slightly tight near the base: notes "bulk 30 min longer next time".	4, 5

Fictional teaching example. It does not describe a real kitchen or a guaranteed result.

Your second loaf.

The same recipe, one change, and a better result.

01 Read your bake log first

Worksheet 3 tells you the real times and temperatures. Worksheet 4 tells you what the loaf was like.

02 Change exactly one thing

Longer bulk, tighter shaping, hotter pot, or a different flour. One.

03 Keep the starter honest

Only bake when it has doubled within 6-8 hours of a feed. [1]

04 Repeat until boring

When three loaves in a row come out the same, you have a recipe. Then start playing.



The notes that make you a better baker.

Every loaf teaches you something. Write it down.

How your starter behaves

Its peak time in your kitchen, at your temperature. [1]

How long bulk really takes

In your kitchen, in each season. [5]

What the crumb looked like

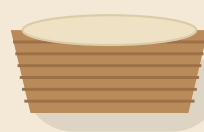
And what you changed the next time.

Which flours you liked

And how much water each one wanted.

Your own timeline

The one that fits your week, not the internet's.



Starter feeding log

One line per feed. Ready means it doubles in about 6-8 hours. [1][2]

Date	Time	Kept / water / flour (g)	Room °F	Peak after (h)	Rise (× start)	Notes

Mark the just-fed level with a rubber band so the rise is easy to read.

My weekend baking plan

Fill in the clock for your week. Stages fixed, times yours. [5]

Stage	Planned time	Actual time	Notes
Feed starter			
Autolyse			
Mix			
Fold 1			
Fold 2			
Fold 3			
End of bulk			
Preshape + rest			
Shape + banneton			
Cold proof start			
Oven on			
Bake lid on			
Bake lid off			
Out + cooling			

See page 11 for the reference timeline and page 16 for how to shift it.

Bake log

One loaf per row. Temperatures explain most surprises. [5]

[illegible]
$$\text{Hydration \%} = \text{water} \div \text{total flour} \times 100.$$

Crumb and crust scorecard

Score 1-5 while the loaf is fresh. Circle what to change next time.

Date	Rise	Open	Even	Colour	Crisp	Tang	Overall	One change next time

See pages 17-18 for what each score usually means.

Troubleshooting notes

One change per bake, so you know what worked.

Date	What I noticed	Likely cause	What I changed	Result

See page 17 for causes and fixes.

Discard planner

Use the week's discard before it is a week old. [2]

Day	Discard (g)	What I will make	Made?	Notes
Mon				
Tue				
Wed				
Thu				
Fri				
Sat				
Sun				

Ideas on page 20. Discard from a healthy starter only. [3]

Sourdough, at a glance.

Stick it on the fridge or save it to your phone.



■ Starter ready

Doubles in about 6-8 h after a feed; bubbly, domed, tangy. [1]

■ Feed it

Daily at room temp or weekly in the fridge: keep 50g, add 50g water + 50g flour. [2]

■ Base loaf

450g bread flour, 50g whole wheat, 350g water, 100g starter, 10g salt (70%).

■ Bulk

About 4 h at 74-76°F with 3 sets of folds; done when domed, jiggly and grown by half or more. [5]

■ Shape + chill

Preshape, rest 25 min, shape tight, fridge about 16 h. [5]

■ Bake

450°F: 20 min lid on, 25-30 min lid off; about 208°F inside; cool 1-2 h. [5]

■ Fix

Change one thing per bake; temperature explains most surprises.

■ Bin it

Pink or orange streaks, or fuzzy mould. Hooch is fine. [3][4]

The useful fine print

Sources behind the specific statements in this studio sample, and what this edition is and is not.

[1] King Arthur Baking: Sourdough starter recipe [Open the source](#)

Day 1: mix 50g whole wheat or pumpernickel flour with 50g cool water in a non-reactive container, cover loosely and leave at warm room temperature (about 70°F). Day 2: discard all but 50g and feed with 50g water and 50g all-purpose flour. Days 3-5: feed twice a day about 12 hours apart, keeping 50g each time. By day 5 or so the starter should at least double in volume in about 6 to 8 hours, be full of bubbles and smell pleasantly tangy. Once it reliably doubles after each feeding it is ready for maintenance and baking.

[2] King Arthur Baking: Feeding and maintaining your sourdough starter [Open the source](#)

Two routines. Room temperature: feed daily, keeping 50g starter and adding 50g water and 50g all-purpose flour; take what you need for baking once it has roughly doubled and is bubbly (about 6 to 8 hours). Refrigerator: feed about once a week; before baking, take it out and repeat the feeding every 12 hours until it doubles or triples within 6 to 8 hours (usually two or three feedings). Use the discard for pancakes, waffles, pizza or flatbread rather than throwing it away.

[3] King Arthur Baking: Sourdough starter troubleshooting [Open the source](#)

Keep the starter at a comfortable room temperature (around 70°F); a little warmer or cooler is fine, but heat above 140°F kills yeast. A missed feeding or an inexact ratio will not harm a mature starter; a brief spell in the freezer makes it sluggish but recoverable. Fuzzy mould of any colour, or a pink or orange tint or streak, means the starter has been overtaken by bad bacteria: throw it out and start again. Stainless steel spoons and bowls are harmless. A mature, well-kept starter is hard to kill.

[4] King Arthur Baking: Liquid on top of sourdough starter [Open the source](#)

The thin liquid that collects on a starter, called hooch, is alcohol and water produced by the wild yeast as it feeds. It means the starter is hungry. Grey, brown or black hooch is not a sign of spoilage; most bakers stir it back in or pour it off, then feed. Mould is fuzzy, and an orange or pink tinge or streak signals bad bacteria: discard the starter.

[5] The Perfect Loaf: Beginner's sourdough bread [Open the source](#)

A worked schedule for a 72% hydration dough: build the levain at 74-76°F for 5 to 6 hours; autolyse the flour and water for 1 hour; mix in levain and salt; bulk ferment about 4 hours at 74-76°F with 3 sets of stretch and folds 30 minutes apart; preshape and rest 25 minutes uncovered; shape and retard in the refrigerator at 38°F (3°C) for about 16 hours; bake at 450°F (232°C) for 20 minutes covered then about 30 minutes uncovered to an internal temperature of around 208°F (97°C); cool 1 to 2 hours before slicing.

About this edition

Written, illustrated and designed by Forgewick, operated by Haris Sohail. Studio Edition 1.0, September 2026. All text, illustrations and worksheets are original. General home-baking guidance: kitchens, flours and ovens differ, so treat every timing as a starting point. Follow normal food hygiene and discard any starter that shows mould or pink or orange streaks.

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THE FIRST LOAF SOURDOUGH PLANNER

Feed on time. Watch the dough. Write it down.

A weekend baking routine for any kitchen,
with six printable worksheets.

FORGEWICK

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