Beginner's Sourdough Bread (No-Knead, Dutch Oven)

Prep: About 1.5–2 hours active; 18–24 hours total including fermentation

A simple, naturally leavened artisan loaf with a tender, open crumb and crisp, crackly crust—perfect for first-time sourdough bakers seeking reliable results.

Ingredients

- all-purpose flour
- water (warm)
- active sourdough starter (active and bubbly)
- salt

Instructions

1. Feed your sourdough starter 4–12 hours before mixing, ensuring it's active, bubbly, and passes the float test.

2. In a large bowl, combine warm water, active starter, salt, and all-purpose flour; mix by hand or with a spoon until a shaggy dough forms.

3. Cover and rest 30 minutes to hydrate the flour (autolyse).

4. Perform one round of stretch and fold: lift and stretch the edge of the dough up and over to the center; rotate the bowl a quarter turn and repeat until you've done four folds total.

5. Cover and complete two additional rounds of stretch and folds, 30 minutes apart.

6. Cover the bowl and bulk ferment in a warm place until doubled in size, about 6–12 hours depending on room temperature and starter strength (avoid over-fermenting).

7. Lightly flour the work surface; gently turn out the dough. Fold it onto itself, roll up, and shape into a taut ball by pulling it gently toward you on the counter.

8. Optional: Rest the shaped ball 15–20 minutes uncovered to allow a light skin to form for easier handling later.

9. For final shaping, place the dough smooth side down; fold two opposite sides to the center and pinch, then repeat with the other two sides to build surface tension.

10. Place the dough seam side up into a well-floured banneton or a towel-lined bowl.

11. Cover (plastic wrap or place in a bag) and cold-proof 12–15 hours in the refrigerator, or proof at room temperature 3–4 hours.

12. When ready to bake, preheat a Dutch oven; invert dough onto parchment, score the top (one expansion score plus optional decorative scores), and bake in the preheated Dutch oven. If not using a Dutch oven, create steam by misting the loaf and placing a pan of water on the oven's lower rack.

Tags: Sourdough, Bread, Beginner Friendly, No Knead, Artisan, Dutch Oven