

Heavy Metal Pain

Pain is what they call bread in France. Heavy metal is what you should use to bake it if you don't have access to a traditional wood-fired hearth oven. Some folks would describe this as sourdough bread, but we call it Heavy Metal Pain (not to be confused with what passes for music in some circles).

Start the starter two days before you want to bake the bread. This recipe should make one large loaf or two small ones. Use the size of the dough after the first rise and the volumetric capacity of your heavy metal as your guide.

Tools

Large, nonreactive mixing bowl (glass, ceramic, or stainless steel)

Flat bladed wooden stirrer or strong spatula

Clean cotton dish towel

Heavy metal: one large cast iron or enameled cast iron dutch oven with lid per recipe

Ingredients

5 cups premium unbleached bread flour for starter and dough plus two tablespoons for sprinkling

1 teaspoon activated dry yeast

1 tablespoon any Hey Bubba brand salt that strikes your fancy

Parchment paper

Method

Temperature is one of the most important factors in breadmaking. Treat the starter and dough like a delicate baby and you'll be successful. They like to be kept warm, and they like to be fed at the same time. Each dry ingredient that goes into the starter and dough, and every container or surface they come in contact with before baking (except your hands) should be about the same temperature; ideally 68-76 degrees F. Water should be warm to the touch, not hot or scalding. If you keep the starter and dough warm and feed them at the same time each day, they should rise well and make a crusty loaf with a soft crumb.

A. Day One - Starter

1 cup bread flour

1 teaspoon yeast

1 1/3 cups water (warm, but not hot to touch)

Mix flour and yeast in bowl.

Add water and combine until you have a smooth mixture.

Cover with a clean cotton cloth.

Place bowl in a warm spot away from drafts, such as atop your refrigerator (not in your oven).

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B. Day Two - Starter

1 cup bread flour
1 1/3 cups water (warm, but not hot to touch)

Add flour and water to bowl.
Combine until you have a smooth mixture.
Cover with cloth and place bowl in the same spot.

C. Day Three - Dough

3 cups bread flour
About 2 cups water (warm, but not hot to touch)
1 tablespoon any Hey Bubba brand salt that strikes your fancy

Add flour to bowl in a mound on top of starter.
Add salt to top of flour mound. Stir to mix salt with flour without disturbing starter beneath.

Add about a cup of water to bowl.
Stir to combine starter with flour/salt/water for no more than one minute (until free water is absorbed).

Turn out mixture on lightly floured surface and knead for about 5-10 minutes, adding enough water so the dough is almost tacky. Fold the dough over itself frequently. If you're strong and energetic, only five minutes may be necessary. If not, you should be done within ten minutes. You'll know you're done when the dough is smooth (without dry chunks) and feels elastic (like an innertube with just a bit of air inside it).

Return dough to same bowl, cover with cloth, and place in the same spot to rise.

After about two hours, or when dough has roughly doubled in volume, gently turn out dough on a lightly floured surface.

Gently shape the dough into a ball, then set it (with the ugly side down) on a one foot square piece of parchment paper, sprinkle a bit of flour on the top to prevent cloth from sticking, cover with cloth, and place in the same spot to rise.

After about one hour, place dutch oven with lid in center of oven and turn on oven to preheat at 425 degrees.

After another hour, or when dough has roughly doubled in volume and oven/dutch oven are preheated, carefully remove dutch oven from oven to stovetop and remove lid.

Remove cloth cover from dough. Carefully and gently lift dough by two opposing edges of parchment paper and lower it into preheated dutch oven. Replace lid and return to center of oven to bake. Bake at 425 for 15 minutes, then remove lid from dutch oven. You should see a puff of steam when you do this.

Bake at 425 for another 10-15 minutes until browned to your taste, then remove loaf from dutch oven and cool on a rack.

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Variations

For Herbes de Bubba bread, add one tablespoon Herbes de Bubba before kneading on Day 3.

For rye bread, substitute one cup of rye flour for one of the cups of unbleached bread flour in the dough on Day 3, and add one tablespoon of whole caraway seed before kneading on Day 3.

For whole wheat bread, substitute whole wheat flour for unbleached bread flour (to taste) in the starter and dough on Days 1-3. If using hard whole wheat flour, about a tablespoon or two is a good starting point.

Comments

Choose your flour wisely. Premium organically grown, unbleached, traditionally milled flour will yield the best results. You will be able to taste and feel the difference. Your local specialty food store is likely to be a good source.

A high temperature bake in a preheated dutch oven is about as close as you can get to a traditional wood-fired hearth if your oven is typical of those found in U.S. homes. The dutch oven lid ensures a moist environment to enhance “spring” as gases in the dough expand. The preheated cast iron provides radiant heat, and browns the bottom and sides of the loaf into a crust. The lid is removed part way through baking to promote browning on the top of the loaf.

If you own enough heavy metal and have a large enough oven, you might as well double the recipe and make 3-4 loaves at a time (they freeze well). Wait to multiply the recipe until you get the hang of it.

The recipe calls for gentle handling when you form the loaf and move it to the dutch oven for baking. Gentle handling promotes an open, porous bread structure and enhances “spring”. If you like your bread without large air bubbles, be less gentle.

The best time to make your next batch of starter is after you shape the loaf. Pinch or cut away a handful of the dough as you shape the loaf, place it in the same bowl you used to rise the dough, and repeat the recipe from Day 1 - Starter. This will help improve the flavor and texture of breads made from your next starter.

If you're not ready to make another recipe, you can freeze the handful of dough in an airtight container for future use. Be sure to thaw it and bring it to room temperature before adding it to your next starter.

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