

CHEF DAWN CREATES

Your Two-Day Sourdough Session Guide

A hands-on companion for Chef Dawn's private two-day sourdough class. What to do, what to notice, and why every step matters.

Private culinary experiences in Carlsbad and North County San Diego
Text or call: 917-392-5500
chefdawncreates.com

The Complete Bread Map

Four ingredients, two days, one loaf. Here is the whole journey at a glance so you always know where you are.

DAY 1 — BUILD THE DOUGH	DAY 2 — BAKE THE LOAF
Wake and feed the starter	Dutch oven into the oven
Weigh ingredients	Preheat 450°F, 30+ minutes
Mix	Keep dough cold until ready
Rest 30 minutes	Turn out onto parchment
Three sets of stretch-and-folds	One confident score
Bulk ferment	Lower into the hot pot
Preshape	Covered bake, 20 minutes
Bench rest 30 minutes	Uncovered, 15-25 minutes
Final shape	Cool on a rack
Banneton, seam-side up	Wait one hour before slicing
Final proof / refrigerate 8-24 hours	

Why it matters: The clock provides structure. The dough provides the answer. Temperature and starter strength change the pace of everything on this page.

Starter and Dough Formula

Active Starter Feed

- 25 g mature starter
- 50 g water
- 50 g bread flour

Main Dough

- 450 g bread flour
- 300 g water
- 100 g active starter
- 10 g fine salt

Use a digital scale. Flour packs differently into measuring cups, and small volume differences can substantially change dough hydration.

Why it matters

Baker's percentages only work when the weights are accurate. A scale turns baking into something you can repeat, adjust and learn from.

Essential Equipment

- Digital scale that reads in grams
- Large mixing bowl
- Bowl scraper and bench scraper
- Banneton or a bowl lined with a floured towel
- Rice flour for dusting (it resists sticking)
- Dutch oven with a lid
- Parchment paper or a bread sling
- Lame, razor or a very sharp knife for scoring
- Cooling rack
- Instant-read thermometer (optional but useful)

Why it matters

None of this equipment is exotic. Each piece removes one variable so you can pay attention to the dough instead of fighting your tools.

Day 1 — Wake, Weigh, Mix

Wake and feed the starter

Combine 25 g mature starter, 50 g water and 50 g bread flour. Leave it at room temperature until it is bubbly, meaningfully expanded and smells clean and tangy.

Weigh the ingredients

Weigh everything before you mix. Warm or cool your water to nudge the dough temperature toward the pace you want.

Mix the dough

Combine flour, water, active starter and salt until no dry pockets remain. The dough will look rough, sticky and shaggy. That is correct.

Rest for 30 minutes

A rest lets the flour hydrate fully, which makes the first fold noticeably easier.

Why it matters: Hydration and even mixing set the ceiling on the structure you can build later.

Day 1 — Fold, Ferment, Shape

Three sets of stretch-and-folds, about 30 minutes apart

With damp hands, lift one side of the dough, stretch it up and fold it over. Rotate the bowl and repeat around all four sides. The dough should feel smoother, stronger and less slack after each set.

Bulk fermentation

Ferment until the dough shows meaningful expansion, bubbles along the sides or surface, a smoother top, a lighter feel and a gentle jiggle when you move the bowl.

Preshape and bench rest

Turn the dough out, gently round it and let it rest about 30 minutes uncovered or lightly covered.

Final shape and proof

Build surface tension without tearing, then place the dough seam-side up in a rice-floured banneton. Refrigerate 8–24 hours for the final proof.

Why Day 1 matters: This is when you build the gluten network, create gas and flavor, and learn to recognize properly fermented dough. A fixed timer cannot tell you everything.

Day 2 — Preheat, Score, Bake

- Place the Dutch oven in the oven.
- Preheat to 450°F for at least 30 minutes.
- Keep the dough refrigerated until the oven is fully ready.
- Turn the cold dough onto parchment or a bread sling.
- Score with one clean, confident slash.
- Carefully lower the loaf into the hot Dutch oven.
- Cover and bake for 20 minutes.
- Remove the lid and bake another 15-25 minutes, until the crust reaches the color you want.
- Transfer the loaf to a cooling rack.
- Wait at least one hour before slicing.

Why Day 2 matters: The hot covered pot traps steam so the loaf can expand before the crust sets. Scoring controls where that expansion happens. Cooling is part of baking because the crumb continues to set after the loaf leaves the oven.

Reading the Dough: Visual and Tactile Cues

Active starter

Bubbles throughout, meaningful expansion, a rounded or just-flattening top and a clean tangy aroma.

After mixing

A rough, sticky, shaggy mass with no dry pockets. It is not supposed to look smooth yet.

After the folds

Smoother, stronger and less slack after each set.

Bulk fermentation

Meaningful expansion, bubbles, a smoother top, a lighter feel and a gentle jiggle.

Shaped dough

A taut, smooth surface without tearing. Preserve the gas instead of pressing the dough flat.

Finished loaf

Strong oven spring, an opened score, a fully set crumb and a crust baked to the color and flavor you enjoy.

Temperature changes the timeline. Cooler dough moves more slowly; warmer dough moves more quickly.

Troubleshooting by Symptom

My starter barely rises.

It may be cold, underfed or not yet mature. Give it more time, use a warmer location and feed consistently before mixing dough.

My dough is extremely sticky.

Use damp hands and a scraper. Do not automatically bury it in extra flour. Watch whether the folds build strength.

My dough barely expands.

The starter may be weak, the dough may be cool or bulk fermentation may need more time.

My dough became loose and fragile.

It may be over-fermented, or the flour may not support the hydration. Shape promptly and shorten the next bulk fermentation.

My loaf spread flat.

Review starter strength, bulk duration, shaping tension and final proof.

My crumb is dense.

Common causes include under-fermentation, weak starter or insufficient dough strength.

My crumb is gummy.

Allow the loaf to cool fully. If the problem continues, bake longer and review fermentation.

The bottom burned.

Place a sheet pan on the rack beneath the Dutch oven, change the rack position or reduce the temperature during the uncovered portion.

Still unsure? Text Chef Dawn at 917-392-5500 with your step and what you see.

Starter Care After Class

- Baking weekly: keep the starter at room temperature and feed it on a consistent schedule.
- Baking occasionally: refrigerate it and feed it about once a week.
- Before baking: give it one or two feeds until it reliably doubles and smells clean and tangy.
- Discard is normal. Keeping the culture small keeps feeding manageable.
- A dark liquid layer means it is hungry, not ruined. Stir it in or pour it off and feed.

Take notes

Record the weights, room temperature, timings and what you saw. Your next loaf should teach you something from this one.

Nutrition, Digestion and Cautions

Sourdough fermentation allows yeasts and lactic-acid bacteria to consume available carbohydrates and create carbon dioxide, organic acids and flavor compounds. Enzymes also begin modifying proteins and carbohydrates before baking.

- Fermentation creates flavor and gas.
- Acidity changes dough behavior and contributes to keeping quality.
- Fermentation may reduce some fructans and phytic acid depending on flour, culture, time and temperature.
- Whole-grain flour generally provides more fiber and micronutrients than refined flour.
- Sourdough is still bread and remains a concentrated source of starch and calories.
- Ordinary baked sourdough is not a reliable source of live probiotics because baking kills most starter organisms.
- Health and blood-glucose responses differ among people and recipes.

Food safety and medical caution

Wheat sourdough is not gluten-free. Standard sourdough made with wheat flour is not safe for celiac disease and is not appropriate for a wheat allergy. Fermentation does not reliably reduce gluten to a medically safe level.

Educational information only; not medical or nutrition advice. Anyone with celiac disease, wheat allergy, diabetes, IBS or another diagnosed condition should follow individualized guidance from a qualified clinician.

Evidence sources

Peer-reviewed work on sourdough fermentation and FODMAP/fructan content, phytate reduction during fermentation, whole-grain nutrition reviews, and celiac-disease clinical guidance from national gastroenterology bodies.