

"Hybrid" Sourdough Bread Bowls

Makes: 8-12 bowls depending on size; I often make a half batch since I don't need quite so many.

Ingredients

Dry ingredients

500g all-purpose flour

450g bread flour (can just use all-purpose flour if you don't have bread flour on hand; you can also replace up to 200g with whole wheat or spelt flour if you like the flavor)

20-30g salt (depends on if you want a slightly saltier bread for soup)

4 tsp active dry yeast

Wet ingredients

200g starter mix

650g water

Optional

1 egg, well beaten, for egg wash

Ingredients (half batch - skip egg wash)

Dry ingredients

250g all-purpose flour

225g bread flour (can just use all-purpose flour if you don't have bread flour on hand; you can also replace up to 200g with whole wheat or spelt flour if you like the flavor)

15g salt (depends on if you want a slightly saltier bread for soup)

2 tsp active dry yeast

Wet ingredients

100g starter mix

325g water

Directions

1. 4-12 hours before making the dough, mix 50g starter, 100g water, and 100g all-purpose flour (25, 50, 50 if doing half batch). Cover and leave on the counter until at least doubled in size and bubbly; this can take more or less time depending on the starter and the temperature. I'll often mix it up the night before and start the dough first thing in the morning when it's cold out, but warmer temperatures make the process faster.
2. Mix dry ingredients, then add all the wet ingredients, stir, then knead briefly with your hand for a minute or two to get it mixed. It'll be a bit shaggy and sticky, but as long as it forms a dough, it's good. If it seems a bit dry and isn't coming together, you can add a little water--some flours absorb more than others. Cover and let sit for 15 minutes.
3. Fold the dough (gently scoop on one side, lift, fold over itself, turn 90 degrees, repeat three times). Cover and let rest another 15 minutes, fold a second time, rest another 15, fold a third time, rest 30, fold a fourth time, rest 30, fold a fifth time. The dough will puff up a lot toward the end, but don't worry too much about that. Sometimes I'll do six folds total, sometimes only four, depends on if I lose count. As long as you do at least four or five, it should be good. By the end of this folding process, the dough should be much smoother and soft.
4. Divide the dough into 8-12 balls. I use a kitchen scale to get them roughly equal weights, either ~220g per or ~150g per for smaller ones, but you can also just eyeball it. Gently roll each ball and set on parchment paper on a flat cookie sheet. Leave PLENTY of space between them, I learned that the hard way! I can usually get 3-4 big bowls or 5-6 little ones on a good-sized cookie sheet. A full batch will likely take two rounds of baking unless you have a giant oven and very big cookie sheet.
5. Allow to rise until about doubled--this may take an hour or two. Toward the end, preheat the oven to either 500°F (darker crust) or 425°F (lighter crust). You want a rack in the middle and a second rack underneath--put a metal cake pan or loaf pan on the second rack, with a cup or so of water inside, during the preheat. This helps create steam to improve the crust. I use an old solid aluminum cake pan, but anything metal will work.
 1. *Optional -- you can brush the bowls with an egg wash (1 well-beaten beaten egg) right before baking if you want to give them a nice shine. Since I often make half a recipe, which doesn't use nearly the full egg wash, I don't bother, but if you're making a full batch or want them to look even nicer for company, it's a lovely touch. Brush each bowl gently on top and sides, careful not to use too much pressure.*
6. Once the bread is risen and the oven has heated, put the pan in the oven. When putting the bread into the oven, you can carefully pour some boiling water into the cake pan on the lower rack to give it an extra burst of steam right before closing the door--this isn't necessary, it just helps with creating more steam to improve the crust. I've splashed myself before, so wear oven gloves and be careful if you do this step.
7. **Starting at 500°F** - As you put the dough into the oven, lower the temperature to 475°F. Bake large bread bowls for 15 minutes, then lower the temperature again to 425°F and bake for ~20 minutes. Bake small bread bowls for 10 minutes, then ~15 minutes at 425°F. **Starting at 425°F** - Bake large bread bowls for ~35 minutes. Bake small bread bowls for ~25 minutes. *If you have a baking thermometer, you want the bread to be around 210°F internally. Otherwise, just keep an eye on them around the 35/25-minute mark and take them out when they have a nice dark crust (they'll be darker if you start at 500°F vs. 425°F).*

8. Allow bread bowls to cool on racks. Serve that day or store in an airtight container. They can be reheated in the toaster if you want to crisp them up a little a few days down the road...assuming any make it that long.

Some notes

- Every starter and every oven is different, so there may be a bit of trial and error with your first batch or two. Don't get discouraged! I've been baking sourdough for years and still have flops sometimes, though more often with regular sourdough; the hybrid version seems to work really well so far. The bread tastes good regardless--I often turn not-so-great batches into an egg-and-cheese souffle.
- I want to test doing all the folds of step #3 with 15 minutes between, to shorten the time required for that step, but I haven't done so yet. However, I do know that a little extra time between steps doesn't seem to cause issues, since sometimes the alarm goes off while I'm focused on work and I turn it off and forget to go fold the dough immediately, haha. The important thing is just to make sure there's a series of folds and rests, since that helps with developing the dough's structure.

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