VANILLAGOODS BAKING ACADEMY · BREAD & ENRICHED DOUGH

*Course workbook*

# Sourdough from Scratch

Starter, bulk, shaping, Dutch oven



Intermediate · 5 video lessons · 43 minutes of video · Notes, quizzes and a practice log

## By the end you'll be able to

- Make and keep a lively sourdough starter
- Judge bulk fermentation by look and feel
- Score and bake a loaf with an open crumb

## Inside


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Lesson videos by Lowbrow Fancy, Culinary Exploration, Kelly Welk, The Bread Code and Brian Lagerstrom , watched on YouTube from the course page.

This workbook belongs to _____

Free course: **vanillagoods.com/pages/baking-course/sourdough**

November 2026

START HERE

# How to use this workbook

This workbook goes with the free video course **Sourdough from Scratch** on vanillagoods.com. Watch each lesson there, then use these pages to keep what you learned and to track what you have practised.

1

### Watch

Open the lesson page and watch the creator's video. Jot quick notes on the lined space as you go.

2

### Read and tick

Read the VanillaGoods notes, then tick each key point once you can explain it in your own words.

3

### Check and practise

Answer the three questions, compare with the answer key on page 13, then log your bake.

## Your lesson plan

| | LESSON | VIDEO | WATCHED | QUIZ | PRACTISED |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Making a sourdough starter**<br>Video by Lowbrow Fancy | 7 min | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 2 | **Feeding and maintaining a starter**<br>Video by Culinary Exploration | 5 min | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 3 | **Mixing and bulk fermentation**<br>Video by Kelly Welk | 9 min | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 4 | **Shaping and cold proofing**<br>Video by The Bread Code | 8 min | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |
| 5 | **Scoring and baking in a Dutch oven**<br>Video by Brian Lagerstrom | 14 min | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

## Tools you'll see

Pint jars · Kitchen scale · Silicone spatula · Folding proofer · Jar labels · Instant-read thermometer · Mixing bowls · Bench scraper · Proofing basket (banneton) · Dutch oven · Parchment paper · Cooling rack

Any brand works. The lessons show what each tool is for.

**Keep track online too**

On each lesson page, "Mark complete" saves your progress in your browser, with no account. Finish every lesson and the course page lets you print a free certificate of completion.

# Making a sourdough starter

Video by **Lowbrow Fancy**: *"Easy No-Fail Sourdough Starter Tutorial | Day-by-Day Guide"*

vanillagoods.com/pages/baking-lesson/sourdough-1-making-a-sourdough-starter

*Grow a sourdough starter from flour and water in one to two weeks: what to feed it, what to expect each day and when it is ready.*

### Key points

- [ ] A starter is flour and water fermented by wild yeast and bacteria
- [ ] Feed it every day with equal weights of flour and water
- [ ] It is ready when it doubles within 4–8 hours of a feeding

## What a starter is

Flour carries wild yeast and friendly bacteria. Mixed with water and kept warm, they multiply into a culture that raises bread and gives it a tangy flavor. Whole wheat or rye flour gets a new starter going fastest.

## Day by day

- Day 1: mix equal weights of flour and water, such as 50 g of each, in a jar and cover it loosely
- Keep the jar at about 75–80°F (24–27°C)
- Each day: discard most of the starter, then feed what is left with equal weights of flour and water
- Days 2–3: a burst of bubbles is normal
- Days 4–6: a quiet spell is normal too; keep feeding

## When it is ready

Most starters are ready in 7–14 days. A ready starter doubles within 4–8 hours of a feeding, is bubbly all the way through and smells pleasantly tangy. A layer of gray liquid on top means it is hungry; stir it in or pour it off, then feed. Pink or orange streaks or fuzzy mold mean it should be thrown out and started again.

TOOLS IN THIS LESSON: Pint jars · Kitchen scale · Silicone spatula · Folding proofer

NOTES WHILE YOU WATCH

## ✓ Check yourself

Three quick questions from this lesson. Mark your answers, then compare with the answer key on page 13.

**1 How do you know a starter is ready to bake with?**

- (A) It doubles within 4–8 hours of a feeding
- (B) It has not bubbled for days
- (C) It has turned pink

**2 The starter goes quiet around days 4–6. What should you do?**

- (A) Throw it away
- (B) Add sugar
- (C) Keep feeding it; the quiet spell is normal

**3 What do pink or orange streaks mean?**

- (A) The starter is very active
- (B) The starter should be thrown out
- (C) The starter needs more water

## Practice log

Practice is where the lesson sticks. Note what you made and what you would do differently.

| WHAT I MADE | DATE AND HOW IT WENT |
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# Feeding and maintaining a starter

Video by **Culinary Exploration**: *"Stop Wasting Time & Flour Maintaining A Sourdough Starter. This Strategy is Way Better"*

vanillagoods.com/pages/baking-lesson/sourdough-2-feeding-and-maintaining-a-starter

*Keep a starter healthy with a routine that fits your week: feeding ratios, using it at its peak and storing it in the fridge.*

### Key points

- [ ] The feeding ratio sets how fast the starter peaks
- [ ] Use the starter at its peak, when it has doubled and domed
- [ ] A starter kept in the fridge needs feeding about once a week

## Feeding ratios

A feeding is written as starter : flour : water by weight. At 1:1:1 the starter peaks in about 4–6 hours in a warm kitchen. At 1:5:5 there is more food, so it peaks in about 10–12 hours. Pick the ratio that has it ready when you want to mix dough.

## Routine

- On the counter: feed once or twice a day
- In the fridge: feed, leave out 1–2 hours, then refrigerate; feed about once a week
- Before baking: take it out and give one or two feedings until it doubles on schedule
- Keep the starter small, 20–50 g, so less flour is thrown away
- Mark the jar with a rubber band at the starting level to see the rise

## Watch for

A starter at its peak is domed and full of bubbles; once it starts to sink it is past its best but still usable. A sharp smell like nail polish remover means it is very hungry: feed it more often or at a higher ratio. Discard can go into pancakes, crackers and quick breads.

TOOLS IN THIS LESSON: Pint jars · Kitchen scale · Jar labels · Silicone spatula

NOTES WHILE YOU WATCH

## ✓ Check yourself

Three quick questions from this lesson. Mark your answers, then compare with the answer key on page 13.

**1 What does a 1:5:5 feeding do compared with 1:1:1?**

- (A) It makes the starter peak sooner
- (B) It makes the starter peak later
- (C) It kills the starter

**2 When is a starter at its best for mixing dough?**

- (A) Right after feeding
- (B) Days after it has collapsed
- (C) At its peak, doubled and domed

**3 How often does a refrigerated starter need feeding?**

- (A) About once a week
- (B) Every hour
- (C) Once a year

## Practice log

Practice is where the lesson sticks. Note what you made and what you would do differently.

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# Mixing and bulk fermentation

Video by **Kelly Welk**: *"Straight to the Fridge After Stretch and Folds? My Method for Delicious Sourdough Every Time"*

vanillagoods.com/pages/baking-lesson/sourdough-3-mixing-and-bulk-fermentation

*Mix a sourdough dough, build strength with folds, and learn to judge the first rise by the dough itself instead of the clock.*

### Key points

- [ ] Bulk fermentation is the first rise, from mixing to shaping
- [ ] Stretch-and-folds build strength in place of kneading
- [ ] End bulk when the dough has grown about 50–75% and jiggles

## Mixing

A basic dough is flour, water, starter at about 20% of the flour weight, and salt at 2%. Many bakers mix the flour and water first and rest them 30–60 minutes, a step called autolyse, which makes the dough stretchier before the starter and salt go in.

## Building strength

- During the first 2 hours, do a set of stretch-and-folds about every 30 minutes
- With a wet hand, pull one side of the dough up and fold it over the middle
- Turn the bowl and repeat on all four sides
- After three or four sets the dough holds its shape and feels smooth
- Then leave it alone to finish rising

## Judging the end

Dough temperature sets the pace: at about 78°F (26°C), bulk takes roughly 4–6 hours, and longer in a cool kitchen. Look for a dough that has grown 50–75%, has a domed top, shows bubbles at the edges and jiggles when the bowl is shaken. Ended too soon, the loaf is dense and gummy; too late, the dough turns slack and sticky.

TOOLS IN THIS LESSON: Instant-read thermometer · Kitchen scale · Mixing bowls · Bench scraper

NOTES WHILE YOU WATCH

## ✓ Check yourself

Three quick questions from this lesson. Mark your answers, then compare with the answer key on page 13.

**1 What is bulk fermentation?**

- (A) The final rise in the basket
- (B) The time the loaf spends in the oven
- (C) The first rise, from mixing to shaping

**2 What do stretch-and-folds do?**

- (A) They build strength in place of kneading
- (B) They cool the dough
- (C) They add more starter

**3 How much should the dough grow before shaping?**

- (A) It should triple
- (B) About 50–75%
- (C) It should not grow

## Practice log

Practice is where the lesson sticks. Note what you made and what you would do differently.

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# Shaping and cold proofing

Video by **The Bread Code**: *"The ONLY SOURDOUGH BREAD SHAPING Tutorial You Will Ever Need"*

vanillagoods.com/pages/baking-lesson/sourdough-4-shaping-and-cold-proofing

*Shape a sourdough loaf with a taut skin, then proof it overnight in the fridge for more flavor and a clean score.*

### Key points

- [ ] Preshape, rest 20–30 minutes, then do the final shape
- [ ] Proof seam side up in a floured basket
- [ ] A cold proof of 8–18 hours adds flavor and firms the dough

## Shaping in two steps

Turn the dough out and gather it into a loose round; this is the preshape. Let it rest 20–30 minutes so the gluten relaxes. Then shape it into a round (boule) or an oval (bâtard), folding and rolling so the outside is stretched into a smooth, tight skin.

## The basket and the fridge

- Dust a proofing basket with rice flour, which does not soak in and prevents sticking
- Set the loaf in the basket seam side up
- Cover it so the surface does not dry out
- Refrigerate at about 38–40°F (3–4°C) for 8–18 hours
- Bake it straight from the fridge

## Why proof cold

The slow, cold proof gives the bacteria time to make more flavor, and it lets you bake when it suits you. Cold dough is also firm, so it holds its shape when turned out and scores cleanly. A towel-lined bowl works if you have no basket.

TOOLS IN THIS LESSON: Proofing basket (banneton) · Bench scraper · Kitchen scale · Dutch oven

NOTES WHILE YOU WATCH

## ✓ Check yourself

Three quick questions from this lesson. Mark your answers, then compare with the answer key on page 13.

**1 Why rest the dough between preshaping and final shaping?**

- (A) To let it dry out
- (B) So the gluten relaxes and the dough does not tear
- (C) To cool it down

**2 How does the loaf sit in the basket?**

- (A) Seam side up
- (B) Seam side down
- (C) On its side

**3 What does an overnight cold proof do?**

- (A) It stops all fermentation
- (B) It makes the loaf rise twice as high
- (C) It adds flavor and firms the dough for scoring

## Practice log

Practice is where the lesson sticks. Note what you made and what you would do differently.

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# Scoring and baking in a Dutch oven

Video by **Brian Lagerstrom** : *"YOUR FIRST SOURDOUGH (Sourdough Bread For Complete Beginners)"*

vanillagoods.com/pages/baking-lesson/sourdough-5-scoring-and-baking-in-a-dutch-oven

*Score the loaf, bake it in a preheated Dutch oven with the lid on, then uncover it for a deep brown, crackling crust.*

### Key points

- [ ] Preheat the Dutch oven at 450–500°F (230–260°C)
- [ ] Score to control where the loaf opens
- [ ] Bake lid on for 20 minutes, then lid off until deep brown

### Why a Dutch oven

A covered pot traps the steam that comes off the dough. Steam keeps the crust soft for the first part of the bake, so the loaf can expand fully, and it gives the crust its shine and blisters. Taking the lid off lets the crust dry, brown and crisp.

### Step by step

- Preheat the pot with its lid in the oven for 30–45 minutes
- Turn the cold dough out onto a sheet of parchment, seam side down
- Score with a razor blade: one confident slash about 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep, held at a shallow angle
- Lower the dough into the pot by the parchment and put the lid on
- Bake 20 minutes covered, then 20–25 minutes uncovered at 450°F (230°C)

### Watch for

The loaf is done when the crust is deep brown and the center reads about 205–210°F (96–99°C). Cool it on a rack for at least an hour before slicing; the crumb is still setting and turns gummy if cut hot. The pot is extremely hot, so use thick oven mitts and keep the lid off the counter edge.

TOOLS IN THIS LESSON: Dutch oven · Parchment paper · Instant-read thermometer · Cooling rack

NOTES WHILE YOU WATCH

## ✓ Check yourself

Three quick questions from this lesson. Mark your answers, then compare with the answer key on page 13.

**1 Why bake with the lid on at first?**

- (A) Trapped steam keeps the crust soft so the loaf can expand
- (B) To keep the loaf pale
- (C) To slow the baking

**2 What is scoring for?**

- (A) Decoration only
- (B) To let the salt out
- (C) To control where the loaf opens as it expands

**3 How long should the loaf cool before slicing?**

- (A) Not at all
- (B) At least an hour
- (C) Five minutes

## Practice log

Practice is where the lesson sticks. Note what you made and what you would do differently.

| WHAT I MADE | DATE AND HOW IT WENT |
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ANSWER KEY

# Check your answers

One correct answer per question. If you missed one, the note explains why, and the lesson page has the full notes and the video.

## 1. Making a sourdough starter

1 **A** A starter that reliably doubles after feeding is strong enough to raise bread.
2 **C** Early bubbles come from bacteria that die back; the yeast takes a few more days to build up.
3 **B** Colored streaks or fuzzy mold are signs of spoilage, so start again.

## 2. Feeding and maintaining a starter

1 **B** More fresh flour and water means more food to work through, so the peak comes later.
2 **C** At the peak the yeast is most active, so the dough rises well.
3 **A** Cold slows the culture down, so a weekly feeding keeps it healthy.

## 3. Mixing and bulk fermentation

1 **C** Bulk fermentation is when the whole dough builds gas, strength and flavor before it is shaped.
2 **A** Each set of folds lines up the gluten, so the dough holds its shape.
3 **B** Sourdough is shaped before it doubles; 50–75% growth with a domed, bubbly look is the target.

## 4. Shaping and cold proofing

1 **B** A relaxed dough stretches into a tight skin without tearing.
2 **A** Seam up in the basket means the smooth side is on top once the loaf is turned out to bake.
3 **C** The slow proof builds flavor, and firm, cold dough is easy to score cleanly.

## 5. Scoring and baking in a Dutch oven

1 **A** Steam delays the crust setting, which gives the loaf room to rise and adds shine.
2 **C** Without a score, the loaf bursts at its weakest point.
3 **B** The crumb is still setting while it cools; cut too soon, it is gummy.

WHEN YOU'VE FINISHED

# Three things to do next

1

### Mark each lesson complete

The "Mark complete" button on every lesson page saves your progress in your browser. No account, nothing to sign up for.

2

### Print your certificate

Once all 5 lessons are marked complete, the course page prints a free certificate of completion with your name on it. It records what you finished; it is not an accredited qualification.

3

### Bake it

Practice with VanillaGoods recipes that use what this course teaches.

vanillagoods.com/pages/recipes?q=sourdough

NEXT ON THE LEARNING PATH

## Bread Shaping Skills

Intermediate · Boules, bâtards, baguettes, rolls

vanillagoods.com/pages/baking-course/bread-shaping

**Free guide for this course:** “Sourdough timeline card”, A two-day schedule from feeding the starter to slicing the loaf. Get it from the course page.

Baking with real vanilla? VanillaGoods keeps Madagascar, Uganda and Tahiti vanilla in stock, along with coffee and tea, at vanillagoods.com.

## ✧ Key points from every lesson

### 1. Making a sourdough starter

- A starter is flour and water fermented by wild yeast and bacteria
- Feed it every day with equal weights of flour and water
- It is ready when it doubles within 4–8 hours of a feeding

### 2. Feeding and maintaining a starter

- The feeding ratio sets how fast the starter peaks
- Use the starter at its peak, when it has doubled and domed
- A starter kept in the fridge needs feeding about once a week

### 3. Mixing and bulk fermentation

- Bulk fermentation is the first rise, from mixing to shaping
- Stretch-and-folds build strength in place of kneading
- End bulk when the dough has grown about 50–75% and jiggles

### 4. Shaping and cold proofing

- Preshape, rest 20–30 minutes, then do the final shape
- Proof seam side up in a floured basket
- A cold proof of 8–18 hours adds flavor and firms the dough

### 5. Scoring and baking in a Dutch oven

- Preheat the Dutch oven at 450–500°F (230–260°C)
- Score to control where the loaf opens
- Bake lid on for 20 minutes, then lid off until deep brown

The lesson videos are by independent creators (Lowbrow Fancy, Culinary Exploration, Kelly Welk, The Bread Code and Brian Lagerstrom ) and play in YouTube's own player on the lesson pages; this workbook links to them and copies nothing. Notes, key points, questions and this workbook are written by VanillaGoods for home bakers.

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