

Face it, we don't have as much time on our hands as our grandmothers did, but they sure did know how to make good sourdough bread. My 98-year-old father-in-law said about my bread, "Who made this bread? It tastes just like my mother's."



This kind of "bowl" is perfect for mixing because you can hold onto the handle while giving it a good stir.



Okay, here's my Cinnamon-Raisin Bread ready in less than 5 minutes for its all-day rise—and I only got one finger dirty when I used it to scrape the back of the wooden spoon.



Fresh bread from the oven in just 20 minutes.

MORE GREAT MARYJANESFARM RECIPES

I love teaching people my super-simple 1 minute a day, 5 minutes on Saturday method. Knead-less to say, you won't need any fancy equipment, just some basic gear that you probably already have on hand:

- ceramic bowl
- wooden spoon
- cotton dishtowel
- cookie sheet/parchment paper OR cast-iron saucepan with lid
- muffin tin or broiler pan
- mixing bowl OR 8-cup glass measuring "bowl"
- instant-read thermometer (costs about \$8)

See what I mean? Easy. Now all you need is a few pounds of good ORGANIC flour and purified water. Sorry, but non-organic flour does weird things. It just doesn't want to come alive like organic flour does. In fact, it wants to turn black instead. Now what does that tell you about our food choices? Same thing with chlorinated water. It's a killer. Your starter will die. Hmmm. There's a lesson here. You have to somehow find good water. If you don't have your own pure water from a well, buy either purified or distilled water. I'll give you some resources for organic flour later on. Right now, I'm anxious to see the surprised look on your face that I've come to expect. "That's it?" "That's all?" "It's that easy?"

Your ceramic bowl, kept on the counter—not in your refrigerator, where there are hundreds of unseen mold spores (humidity induces mold)—is going to be the place where your starter—the "mother"—lives. Until you get the hang of it, Sunday morning works well for getting started. Here's how:

Mother: 2 cups unbleached white organic flour
1½ cups purified water

Stir with wooden spoon. Cover with wet dishtowel (see details on p. 68). Now, every morning thereafter, Monday-Friday, you're going to stir in 1/3 cup flour and ¼ cup water. How long does that take? Less than a minute, tops.

On the seventh day, Saturday, your mother will be ready. It should have bubbles and smell pleasantly sour—like stout beer. In the morning, spoon 2 cups of your mother into a mixing bowl. (I use a handled 8-cup glass measuring "bowl" because it also serves as my mixing bowl—no measuring cup to wash.) Then just cover your mother (don't add anything to it today—it's mother's day of rest) and set it aside until the next day, Sunday, when you start your one-minute routine again—stirring in 1/3 cup flour and ¼ cup water.

For basic white Farmhouse Bread: To the 2 cups you removed into your measuring "bowl," add ¾ t salt and 1 t honey (to sweeten the rise). Stir. Add 1½ cups more white flour. Stir with a wooden spoon. It's a good workout for your arm (the handle on the measuring "bowl" helps you get the job done), but you know you need it—you just don't knead it, the time-consuming part that I never really came to terms with, even though I know my grandmother kneaded her bread for something like 20 minutes. My ritual takes no more than a couple of minutes.

Now you're going to make a decision about the shape of your bread and what you're going to bake it on (or in)—cookie sheet lined with parchment paper or cast-iron saucepan? I love using smaller cast-iron saucepans because their thick walls absorb and distribute the heat evenly and gently—yummy crusts. And in a way, cast iron bakes bread much like our ancestors' earthen ovens did.

For the size batch I've started you out on, a 1½ to 2-quart lidded cast-iron saucepan works best. If your saucepan hasn't been used much for baking, rub it with some butter and then line it with some parchment paper until it gets "seasoned" (becomes non-stick). Simply stuff a square of paper down into the pan or fuss a bit and cut out a bottom circle and sides.



Love Your Mother

Your mother deserves the very best. But I've learned that not all flours are made alike. Even though there are some great organic whole-wheat and rye flours available, good organic white flour—the flour I recommend for initially creating your sourdough starter (mother)—is hard to find, and I've tried them all. Trust me on this. It's like the difference between a garden tomato and one purchased in a grocery store. I want you to use flour with good rise (gluten content) that tastes like a champ. The only brand I can recommend is King Arthur Flour

(www.kingarthurfLOUR.com).

They have both **Organic Baker's Classic Bread Flour** and **Organic Unbleached All-Purpose Flour** available mail order and in select stores across the country. If you're hard-core against white flour, you can experiment with whole-wheat flours for your mother, but results will vary. Whole wheat has certainly worked for me, but I'm the doggedly determined adventuresome type. In recommending white flour, I want to make sure you don't get discouraged from the get-go. Once you master the white mother, don't hesitate to get creative. Over time, you can convert your mother to 100 percent whole wheat. Put your thinking cap on and be fearless—you have time. Your mother is perfectly capable of outliving you.

Multi-Grain Bread:

To 2 cups mother, add $\frac{3}{4}$ t salt, 1 t honey, and $\frac{1}{3}$ cup multi-grain

Spoon your mass of sticky, gooey bread dough into the pan. Put the lid on, cocked ever so slightly so it can breathe, set aside in a warm place (at least 70°F), and **wait 6–8 hours**, or until it's almost time for dinner. (If you want a smooth top, wet your hands and pat the top before you set it to rise.)

Now that your dough has risen all day (a slow, natural rise as opposed to a premature and forced yeast-made-in-a-factory rise), **preheat your oven to 425°F**. Put a muffin tin or broiler pan on the bottom shelf full of water. (I prefer a muffin tin because the water doesn't slosh around as I'm putting it into the oven; I use an enamel muffin tin because it can't ever rust.) Oven moisture is what will give your bread that moist, chewy, marvelous "crumb" that my father-in-law recognized instantly as the real deal, bursting with life and flavor ... just like Grandma's bread. The cast iron gives it that thin, but crisp, slightly tough crust. At this point, I really can't eat the cakey, boring bread sold in most stores these days. I want hearty. I want healthy. I want real. I want bread that doesn't make me feel overly yeasty and yucky. Google "candida yeast" and you'll know what I'm talking about.

Take the lid off the pan and put it in the oven on the middle shelf. **Baking time will vary** according to shape and size. **Check for doneness at 20 minutes**, using your thermometer. Once the internal temperature is 195–205°F and your bread is nicely browned, remove from the oven and tip your loaf out onto a cooling rack. (This will keep your crust crisp on all sides; a dishtowel on the counter will also work.) Butter the top while it's hot if you want.

OR

Make round rustic loaves that you bake on a cookie sheet lined with parchment paper. (Did you know you can buy non-petroleum-based, earth-friendly parchment paper now? www.ifyoucare.com) To use this method, **dust a bread-board** with PLENTY of flour. Dust your hands too. You can make two grapefruit-sized loaves (about one pound each) or four orange-sized loaves. This will feel like you're trying to coat a sticky water balloon with flour. Holding the "water balloon" in your hands, **gently stretch the surface** of the designated top around to the designated bottom while rotating, adding a generous amount of flour to your hands as needed. The bottom of the loaf will be lumpy and uneven. Don't worry, it will all come out in the bake. This will take no more than a minute, if not less. **Place your loaves on the cookie sheet**, smooth tops up. Slash the tops $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch deep with a sharp knife. (If you don't have a serrated bread knife by now, it's time to indulge.) If your bread "bursts" outside the slashes, don't worry—that just makes it look more rustic.

Let your loaves sit for at least 4 hours uncovered—longer, up to 8 hours, works just fine. Then, **follow the above instructions** for baking with water. This method will give you a more crackly crust than the cast-iron method. Both are delish! If the flour dust on this kind of loaf bothers you, swipe it with butter or oil while it's still hot—flour be gone! (The flour "coat" helps seal in moisture while it's rising. It's a trick borrowed from farming. When we're working soil and planting seed, we like to leave a fine layer of dust on the surface to trap moisture so the seeds we've planted will sprout.) Or, if you're around during the rise, you can cover them with a thin cotton dishtowel, moistened throughout the day.

cereal (raw cracked grains). Mix thoroughly. Stir in $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups unbleached white flour.



Cinnamon-Raisin Breakfast Rolls: To 2 cups mother, add $\frac{3}{4}$ t salt, $\frac{1}{3}$ cup honey, $1\frac{1}{2}$ t cinnamon, $\frac{3}{4}$ cup raisins, and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup chopped walnuts. Mix thoroughly. Stir in 1 cup unbleached white flour and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup whole wheat flour.



Caraway-Rye Bread:

To 2 cups mother, add $\frac{3}{4}$ t salt, 1 t honey, and 2 T caraway. Mix thoroughly. Stir in $1\frac{1}{2}$ cups rye flour. Shown below, one BIG loaf made from a double batch, coated with egg-white wash, topped with caraway seeds, and baked for 35 minutes. (This loaf was covered during its rise with a thin cotton dishtowel, moistened throughout the day.)



Storing Your Mother

Your mother will live on your counter, right next to where you make your morning tea or coffee, so her daily stir can be part of your morning routine. But there's a finesse to covering her. For the first week of her life, she needs to be covered with a thin, dry cotton dishtowel because she'll need lots of air and breathing room. But after that, you'll want to wet your towel with purified water, place it over the bowl, then cover it with a plate that is slightly ajar to allow for some air. The plate will help the towel stay moist throughout the day, preventing a crust from forming on your mother. A

thin crust can be stirred back in, but not a thick one. Also, the insides of your bowl will get shellacked over time with layers of flour. About once a month you can transfer her to another bowl and scrap it clean, but the layers of flour paste won't hurt a thing.



Any questions?

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