

Soft Sourdough Sandwich Loaf

This is the soft sandwich loaf you already know from BB100 and BB200. The only new thing is your starter. It rises more slowly than the yeast you used before, and the butter slows it a little more, so let the dough tell you when it's ready.

Ingredients

Ingredient	Baker's %	One loaf	Two loaves
Bread flour	100%	500 g	1000 g
Whole milk, room temperature	50%	250 g	500 g
Water	15%	75 g	150 g
Ripe sourdough starter	20%	100 g	200 g
Honey	4%	20 g	40 g
Butter, softened	8%	40 g	80 g
Fine sea salt	2%	10 g	20 g

One loaf fits a 9x5 loaf pan lined with parchment.

Before you start

Your starter should be at its peak: doubled, domed, bubbly, and smelling of fresh yeast. Bring the milk to room temperature, because cold milk slows a young starter even more. Using raw milk? Scald it and let it cool first.

Method with a stand mixer

- Mix.** Flour, milk, water, starter and honey on low until no dry flour remains. Cover and rest 30 minutes while the flour drinks.
- Salt.** Add the salt and mix on low for 2 to 3 minutes.
- Butter.** Once the dough starts pulling away from the bowl, add the butter a piece at a time. Mix until you can stretch a windowpane.
- Bulk.** Into a straight-sided container, rubber band at the dough line. Two or three sets of folds in the first 90 minutes, then leave it until it shows all three signs below.
- Shape and chill.** Shape the loaf, set it seam down in the lined pan, cover, and refrigerate 8 to 15 hours.
- Final proof and bake.** Proof until the loaf is 1/2 to 1 inch above the edge of the pan, then bake (see Bake and Cool).

No mixer? By hand

Stir the flour, milk, water, starter and honey with a sturdy spoon until no dry flour remains, then rest 30 minutes. Squeeze in the salt. Knead on an unfloured counter for about 5 minutes, then work in the butter a piece at a time. It will feel greasy and slip apart at first; keep going. Knead until it is smooth and stretches into a windowpane, often 10 to 15 minutes in all.

Reading the dough: the three signs

Bulk fermentation is done when you see all three. The clock is only a guess; in a cool kitchen it can run longer than you expect.

1. The rise

Up about 50 to 75% from the rubber band you set at the start.

2. Dome and bubbles

A rounded, soft top, bubbles on the surface and sides, and the creases from your folds have puffed out.

3. The poke

A floured fingertip pressed in springs back slowly and leaves a small dent. It smells milky and gently tangy.

This dough is lower hydration, so it won't wobble like a wet dough when you nudge the container. Go by the rise, the dome and the poke. Never sharp, never like nail polish remover. That smell means it went too far.

If your dough is moving slowly

Some days the dough just takes its time. A cool kitchen, a sleepy starter or a different flour can all slow it down. You haven't done anything wrong, and you don't have to stay up waiting for it.

Pause it in the fridge

1. Give the dough one last stretch and fold.
2. Put the lid on your dough bucket so it doesn't dry out.
3. Pop it in the fridge overnight. The cold slows everything down, and the dough picks up extra flavor while it rests.

The next morning

1. Check the dough first. If it shows the three signs, shape it while it's cold. Cold dough is much easier to handle.
2. If it isn't there yet, move it somewhere warm (a proofer at about 78°F, or the oven with just the light on) to finish rising.
3. Plan for warm-up time. Dough straight from the fridge needs at least 90 minutes just to warm up before it starts rising again. Mine took about 4 hours in the proofer at 78°F before it was ready to shape.
4. Pre-shape, rest 20 to 30 minutes, final shape, then proof and bake as written.

A slow dough is not a failed dough. The fridge buys you time, and the bread often tastes even better for it.

Shaping the pan loaf

1. Turn the dough out and pat it into a rectangle about as wide as your pan is long.
2. Fold it in thirds like a letter.
3. Roll it up tight from the short end, pressing as you go to build tension on the outside.
4. **Neat ends:** slip your index fingers into the ends and tuck the coils inside the loaf.
5. Pinch the seam closed and set it seam down in the lined pan.

As you shape: brush off any extra flour as you fold and roll, because flour left on the dough stops the seams from sealing. If you find a big bubble, pop it.

Covering your shaped loaf

- Make sure the shower cap or plastic isn't stuck to the dough. Pulling it off can tear the dough and degas it.
- **What does degassing mean?** It's knocking out the gas bubbles the dough has spent hours building. Those bubbles give your loaf its rise, so we want to protect them.
- If your cover looks like it will touch the dough as it rises, lightly spray the inside of the plastic with cooking spray so it lifts off easily.
- Using a proofer? Cover the loaf pan with a disposable shower cap and set it in the proofer at 78°F.

Ready to bake?

Don't use the clock. Watch the loaf and the edge of the pan.

- **Bake when the dough has risen 1/2 to 1 inch above the edge of the pan, and no more.** Any higher and you risk overproofing, which gives you a flattened mushroom top instead of a beautiful dome.
- A floured fingertip poke springs back slowly and leaves a small dent. If the poke stays in, bake right away.
- **A handy checkpoint:** when the center of the loaf is just coming above the edge of the pan, I know I'm about 30 to 40 minutes from baking (in my kitchen, with the proofer at 78°F). Your timing may differ, so keep watching.
- From the fridge, a shaped loaf often takes 2 to 4 hours on the counter.
- Be extra careful with sourdough. Overproofed sourdough really loses its shape. It's less forgiving than yeasted dough.

Reading the rise correctly

Don't be fooled by the parchment sling. Parchment puffs up and gives you a false read on where the edge of the pan is. Pull the paper down and hold it at the true edge of the pan.

Block the back of the pan with your hand. If you can see past the pan into open space, that can fool your eye too. With your hand behind the pan, all you see is the loaf and the edge of the pan.

Bake and cool

1. Preheat the oven to 400°F. I like a long preheat for bread.
2. Load the bread, then turn the oven down to 375°F. That first blast of heat helps with oven spring.
3. **Covered pan:** I bake in a covered pan because the lid traps the steam. The lid stays on for the first half of the bake. At about 20 minutes, take it off so the loaf can brown for the second half. It's the same rule we use for Dutch oven baking.
4. **Regular loaf pan?** Put a shallow metal or cast iron pan in the oven while it preheats. When you load the bread, drop a few ice cubes into that hot pan for steam. Never use glass for this, keep ice and water off the oven door glass, and stand back from the burst of steam.
5. **How to know it's done:** don't go by color. The real check is the internal temperature. Your loaf is done at 200 to 205°F in the center. The honey browns the top quickly, so tent it with foil if it darkens before it's done.
6. Lift it out of the pan right away and set it on a rack.

Cooling is part of the bake. Let your bread cool completely before you cut it. Cooling sets the crust and the crumb, and as the loaf cools it drives off steam, which is a key part of the bake. Cutting bread while it's hot is what causes a gummy crumb. I know it's hard to wait, but it's worth it.

What your loaf is telling you

What you see	Why	Next time
Short and dense, tight crumb, often torn along one side	Underproofed	Wait for all three bulk signs and for the loaf to rise 1/2 to 1 inch above the edge of the pan, even past the recipe time.
Top sinks or flattens in the oven (mushroom top), big holes under the crust, sour smell	Overproofed	Check sooner, and bake when the poke springs back slowly, not when it stays in.
Pale sides that cave in as it cools	Underbaked	Bake to 200 to 205°F inside. Tent the top with foil if it browns early.
Gummy crumb	Cut too soon, or underbaked	Cool completely before slicing, and check the internal temperature.

From my kitchen

- **What lives in my oven:** an enameled baking dish filled with lava rocks. When I bake breads that won't fit in a Dutch oven, like baguettes, I drop ice cubes onto the hot rocks for a burst of steam.
- **Keeping more than one starter?** Give each one its own spatula.

Baking once a week? My starter schedule

Keep your fed starter in the fridge between bakes. Then count back from the day you want to bake. For a Sunday bake:

When	What to do
Thursday, before bed	Take your starter out of the fridge. Discard and feed.
Friday morning	Discard and feed.
Friday, before bed	Discard and feed.
Saturday, mid-morning (about 10am for me)	Build your dough once your starter is bubbly and has risen.
Sunday	Bake!

Want to bake on a different day? Just shift the whole schedule. The times are a guide, not a rule. Your starter tells you when it's ready, not the clock.

Your bake

Write down what your kitchen actually did. After two or three bakes you will know your own dough's timing better than any recipe can.

Date:

Room temperature:

Dough temperature after mixing:

Bulk started at: Bulk finished at:

Hours in the fridge:

Time on the counter before baking: Minutes in the oven:

Notes:

Share a photo of your crumb and your bulk time in the comments on the lesson. I read every one.