

Wild Hittites, Wild Spores, Wild Beer, And... Real Sourdough!
Real Sourdough For Your Bread, Biscuits, And Pancakes

Chuckwagon
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Introduction

Well Pard, I know we are all about sausages here but... we HAVE to know how to craft a good bun to wrap around the sausages . You know – something mighty tasty like authentic Sourdough bread! I get excited about REAL sourdough. Let's have a look at its history and then hand-craft a batch for your taste buds!

The ancient Hittites dipped unleavened flatbread into water to soften it enough to be eaten. Undoubtedly, one night after supper, some Hittite cowboy forgot to throw out the water and wild desert yeast spores (living plants of sac fungi) combined with the floury-water, feeding upon a nutritional compound of carbohydrates and glucose. In the presence of oxygen, enzymes called *zymas* converted the compound into carbon dioxide – the perfect bread-leavening gas for making sourdough bread. Without oxygen, the compound is converted into alcohol through the process we know as *fermentation*. A few days later, a Hittite horse wrangler just had to try drinking the stuff, and probably fell into his campfire. Thus, beer was born. While making sourdough bread, you will notice the pungent aroma of fermented beer. You will also recognize the wonderfully distinct and rich flavor of sourdough bread made with wild desert yeast spores. First recorded by the Egyptians, cultivated yeast as a leavening agent was probably originally developed by the Hebrews during their 430 year captivity. Involuntarily abandoned in their hasty departure from Egypt, an unpredictable substitute was provided by introducing wild desert yeast spores to a medium of spoiled buttermilk with sugar. Unrefined, this "sour" dough starter proved to be a comparatively calculable leavening, providing a reliable substitute. Hence, we have sourdough – with its natural form of leavening and distinctive fermented flavor. Producing carbon dioxide gas in a semi-predictable pattern, it has little in common with baking powder, in which the chemical reaction of an acid (cream of tartar) and an alkali (sodium bicarbonate) may deteriorate with prolonged storage.

Gluten is a compound of gliadin and glutenin proteins found in flour, giving dough it's elasticity, and the two proteins are usually found in roughly the same proportion. Containing the properties of a thickened fluid, gluten forms whenever water is mixed with flour and is able to confine and suspend carbon dioxide gas produced by activated yeast, allowing bread to rise. Gluten develops by kneading and

working the dough. If it is overworked and not allowed to rest, the final product will be tough and chewy. A flaky pie crust is made of dough kneaded only a minimum number of times as compared to more substantial bread dough involving much more kneading. As you shop, compare the various gluten contents of several manufacturers' flour, and soon you will find yourself routinely selecting a preferred brand with specific gluten content for use in making sourdough. Regular supermarket bread flour has about 12 percent protein content. The flour most preferred at our ranch for use in country-style bread, contains closer to 14 percent gluten. How do you raise the gluten content? Simply add a little more water to the dough. A third cup added to a two-loaf recipe will do the trick. On the other hand, you may reduce the gluten content to 11 percent by adding a third cup less water. Whenever making sourdough bread, remember to use plain white or whole grain flour, as self-rising flour contains other leavening agents or chemicals. Although it is a good product, it is not ideal for sourdough bread making.

Gettin' "Started"

Countless articles have been written by greenhorns trying to shorten or simplify the process for making the original "San Francisco" recipe given to prospectors headed to Alaska. Don't be fooled by simplified recipes or those using anything but buttermilk to produce a "starter". The indigenous wild yeast spores of San Francisco are legendary and most old timers will tell you, "the older the starter – the "better the batter". Sourdough starter may be purchased commercially but then...it's not from "scratch". You may make a fine starter yourself by simply mixing buttermilk and a few common ingredients. Who knows? A hundred years from now your own great-grandchildren may remember to acknowledge your own "start".

To store sourdough starter and retard its fermentation, refrigerate it. It's simple as that! Actually, the ideal inert temperature is 42 degrees F., a little higher than that of most refrigerators. The starter will activate upon gradual warming to room temperature and is then added to your favorite flour used in any recipe for biscuits, breads, or pancake batter. Unless a recipe specifies it, never allow dough to raise more than twice its size with any leavening agent as it reduces the chewy texture and alters the flavor. You may however, accelerate the production of gas bubbles by placing the bowl containing the dough over another bowl of warm water. Never raise dough on a stovetop over a warm oven as it may begin to cook. Be sure to cover the bowl with a damp towel to keep the dough moist while it is rising. Another accelerator for raising yeast dough is the addition of a little milk and sugar and a little experience will soon let you know just how much to add to a recipe. Making sourdough is not a difficult process and very much worth the effort whenever people ask how you "rustled up such tasty grub"! When the lid comes off the Dutch oven and fills the air with its distinctive aroma, they'll go crazy! Yup pards, sourdough is magic!

OKay Sausagewest wranglers, let's get down to business. The process of making sourdough breads, biscuits, pancakes, and a variety of other "sourdough" baked goods, consists of two parts: (1) sourdough starter and (2) sourdough batter.

Sourdough *starter* is made by mixing:

- 1 cup of water
- 1 tblspn. sugar
- 1 cup flour
- 4 tblspns. buttermilk

Use buttermilk only as other milk just will not make the magic. Mix the ingredients together inside a glass or stainless steel bowl, cover it with a damp towel, and then store it four or five days in a warm

area. As the starter ferments, you will smell that wonderfully familiar sourdough aroma and will know when it is ready.

Sourdough *batter* is made ten or twelve hours before baking by:

- removing the starter from the refrigerator and allowing it to slowly warm up to room temperature,
- measuring out 1-1/2 cups of starter and placing it into a bowl,
- adding 1-1/2 cups of flour and 1 cup of tepid water, and mixing the batter well, and
- replacing the starter used in the recipe, by stirring additional flour and water into the remaining original starter, maintaining its volume, finally placing it back into the refrigerator.

Old sourdoughs say each time you make bread, you must “take a little and add a little”. They are, of course, referring to the starter. Use the sourdough batter mixture in recipes as called for, to make sourdough biscuits, breads, and other favorites. Return the remainder to the bowl. That’s it! Now you know the secrets of making sourdough. Remember to use only tepid water at about 110 degrees F. as higher temperatures will kill the living bacteria in the yeast and the bread will not rise.

“Cowboy’s Classic Sourdough Bread”

(Tried And True Classic Sourdough Bread)

- 2 cups proofed sourdough batter (see instructions)
- 1 pkg. dry yeast
- 1cup tepid water (110 degrees F.)
- 3-1/2 tspns. sugar
- 1 tspn. salt
- 6-1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/2 can of “lager” beer

Dissolve the salt in 1/3 cup of the water and reserve it. Check the expiration date on the yeast and dissolve it in the remaining water and beer. Add the sugar and allow it to proof ten minutes. Next, add the salt solution, flour, and sourdough batter and make dough. Knead the dough until it becomes smooth and elastic. Place the dough into a glass bowl and cover it with a dampened towel or plastic wrap, allowing it to double in volume in about 60 minutes. Punch the dough down, cover it in the bowl, and allow it to rise again in about 45 minutes. Having punched the dough down for the second time, shape round loaves using a bowl or basket lined with a lightly floured clean cotton cloth. Use a flour sifter to create a light, even sprinkling of flour over the entire surface of the dough. Always cover loaves with a dishtowel or plastic wrap to avoid the formation of a dried pellicle. Allow the loaves to rise again at least forty-five minutes.

Bake the loaves inside a couple of Dutch camp ovens or place them onto a floured baking sheet in the upper half of a pre-heated kitchen oven. Place a small, shallow, pan of hot water into the bottom of the oven to help produce a crust with steam. You may also wish to sprinkle buttered loaves with sesame or poppy seeds. Bake the bread at 375 degrees F. for 35 minutes or until a golden brown crust forms.

A few sourdough tricks include the use of half water and half evaporated milk (not condensed milk which contains 40% more sweetener) in the recipe for a very smooth consistency of texture. If you wish to make bread more moist for sandwiches, add a teaspoon of olive oil to the ingredients. I also like to

add an egg once in a while just to give it a special texture. It will be difficult, but you really should allow the bread to cool ten minutes before slicing it.

“Saddle Bum’s Sourdough Rye Ranch Bread”

(Hearty Sourdough Rye Sandwich Bread)

Rye, usually mixed with other types of flour, adds incredible depth and flavor to baked goods including rye bread, pumpernickel, rye crackers, and of course, sourdough rye breads and biscuits! Rye’s robust cereal grain, though not as sturdy as barley, produces flour with lower gluten content than wheat flour, yet contains a higher proportion of soluble fiber. Often used for hay, rye grass is more tolerant of acidic soil, cool weather, and dry conditions, than wheat. Rye grain is also the principal base of mash used in making rye whiskey, rye beer, and some vodka. In the old west, a shot of rye whiskey was called a “jack of diamonds”. A “bar dog” (bar tender) hearing the words “rebel soldier” (rye whiskey) “wearing overalls” (double shot) would serve the customer two shot glasses and leave the bottle.

If you happen to enjoy the flavor of rye with sourdough as much as we do in the Rockies, make this hearty sourdough bread that you may dip n’ dunk in less polite company. Try it with thick and delicious vegetable beef soup “fixins”, or your ranch-style “meaty mooligan” stewin’ “doin’s”.

- 2 cups wheat bran
- 2 cups dark rye flour
- 3-1/2 cups white unbleached flour
- 2 cups proofed sourdough batter
- 6-1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 pkg. dry yeast
- 1 can lager beer
- 1/2 cup molasses
- 2 tspns. kosher salt
- 2 tblspns olive oil
- 2 cups tepid water (110 degrees F.)
- 1 cup warm evaporated (not condensed) milk
- butter to rub onto finished loaves
- sesame or poppy seeds

Dissolve the salt into 1/3 cup of the water and reserve it. Dissolve the yeast inside a glass bowl with half the remaining water, add the milk, beer, and the molasses allowing the mixture to proof ten minutes. Mix the bran, flour, rye, olive oil, sourdough batter, and the salt solution together, forming sticky dough. Knead the dough several minutes, adding a little flour if necessary.

Cover the bowl with a dampened towel, allowing the dough to raise in about 60 minutes or until it doubles in size. Sprinkle the dough with flour then punch it down, allowing it to rise again in about 45 minutes. Punch the dough down again, cut it in half, and shape it into loaves, lightly diagonally slicing the tops three times each. Place the loaves upon floured baking sheets or inside Dutch camp ovens if you’re on the trail, and allow them to rise again. Now, brush on some butter and sprinkle the loaves with toasted sesame or poppy seeds.

Place the loaves into the upper half of a pre-heated kitchen oven and add a small pan of hot water to help produce crispy crusts. Bake the bread 35 minutes or more, at 375 degrees F., until golden brown

crusts form. If you wish to have slightly more moist bread for sandwiches, add another teaspoon of olive oil to the ingredients. Allow the bread to cool ten minutes before slicing it.

Please try this recipe using a Dutch oven over the hot coals of your campfire following your next cattle-rustlin' job or whitewater canoe-trip.

“Shuttle Bucket Sourdough Biscuits n’Gravy”

(Soda-Raised Sourdough Biscuits With Gravy)

Biscuits:

- 2 cups sourdough batter
- 2-1/4 cups flour
- 1 tblspn. baking powder
- 1/2 tspn. baking soda
- 1/2 tspn. salt
- 1/4 cup butter (or shortening)
- 1/2-cup milk or buttermilk.

Prepare the batter the night before baking. Mix the dry ingredients with the butter (or shortening) until it is “grainy”. Stir in the milk, batter, and salt. Knead the dough for 30 seconds only, roll it out to 1/2” thickness, and cut out 3” circles (easily done with the floured rim of a drinking glass). Coat the bottom of a pre-heated black skillet with two tablespoons of butter and dip the dough circles into it, turning them over to bake at 400 degrees F., for 15 minutes or until they are golden brown.

Gravy:

- 8 ounces breakfast sausage
- 2 tblspns. shortening
- 3 tblspns. flour
- 3/4 cups milk
- ½ tspn. celery salt
- salt and pepper to taste
- dash cayenne pepper

Cook the sausage in a medium black skillet over medium-low heat, stirring and breaking up the ground meat with a spatula. Remove the browned crumbled sausage temporarily while you melt the shortening in the drippings inside the skillet. Add the flour, cooking it as you stir to create a roux paste. Add the milk to the roux and heat the mixture until it thickens. Return the sausage to the mixture, season it, and serve it over hot split and buttered Shuttle Bucket Sourdough Biscuits.

Storing, Freezing, And Thawing Bread

The reason bread becomes stale is not moisture loss, rather it’s caused by process called retro gradation, in which starch molecules in bread crystallize. Retro gradation in bread occurs about six times more quickly at refrigerator temperatures (36-40 degrees) than at room temperature, thereby making the refrigerator the worst choice for storing bread. However, retro gradation slows down significantly when bread is stored below freezing temperatures. Store bread at room temperature up to three days in a container that minimizes moisture loss. After three days, wrap bread tightly in foil, place it inside a freezer bag, and freeze it.

Since cold temperatures accelerate retro gradation, it is only logical that the process would be reversed by heat. Right? Anyone who has ever softened stale bread in an oven or microwave has witnessed retro gradation reversal. Ovens don't add moisture, yet whenever stale bread (with crystallized starch) is heated to temperatures beyond 140 degrees (the gelation temperature of wheat starch), the crystals break down as their molecules form gel, softening the bread. Thaw full or partial loaves still wrapped in foil, inside a 450-degree oven for 10 or 15 minutes, then crisp the bread by removing the foil and returning it to the oven for a minute or two.

Sourdough Pancake Batter

In the high western desert, we put Coors into everything imaginable, with the exception of the radiators of motor vehicles. Yup, "Colorado Cool-Aid" is wonderful in biscuit and bread batters too. It somehow leaves behind the wonderful flavor of grains and hops in sourdough. Prepare the batter the night before it is used and allow it to "proof" slowly bringing it to room temperature an hour ahead of breakfast time. The aroma of griddle-cooked, sourdough hot cakes will drive your cowboys wild and has been known to incite and induce unexplained, arcane, and irresponsible behavior not unlike leaping onto kitchen tabletops, dancing with spurs on, and shooting the ceiling full of .45 caliber holes while, hollering "it's sourdough 'ya all"!

Many of the best western chefs will tell you they cut back on leavening and use buttermilk thinned with regular milk for best flavor and texture in their pancakes. This ol' codger is still makin' 'em with sourdough using a little buttermilk, definitely imparting deep flavor and characteristic tang. The most essential issues involving the perfect creation of pancakes and all quick breads, is getting the leavening just right and I recommend a combination of baking powder and baking soda to leaven pancakes. Why? A small amount of baking soda gives the cakes a coarser crumb and makes them light and tender. Baking powder helps them rise. Since baking soda begins to activate immediately when mixed with the buttermilk, the addition of baking powder, which is activated by griddle heat, guarantees the leavening power will endure throughout the pancake-making process.

Remember, the more you mix or stir a quick-bread batter, the more you develop the gluten in the flour, creating a tougher cake or bread. The quickest way to incorporate wet and dry ingredients together, is to dump the milk mixture into the flour mixture all at once, then quickly mix it with a whisk, ensuring a virtually lumpless batter within seconds. Pancakes are so quick and simple to make, you should really experiment a little, being aware of a few ol' sourdough "musts" you'll have to understand before your own hotcakes become legendary. First, the batter has to be just the right texture. Runny batters cook into crepes while thick batters may cook up wet and heavy. Second, the griddle needs to be exactly the correct temperature. An overly heated griddle delivers a cake with a scorched exterior and raw interior while a cool griddle or skillet gives the cake a hard, thick crust with a dry interior. A griddle (or large black skillet) is heated perfectly for hot cakes at 375° F. Sprinkle a few drops of water on it. If they dance around, brush the utensil generously with oil, pour the batter and start cookin'! Dispense about 1/4 cup at a time onto the griddle, being sure not to crowd the pancakes. When bottoms are brown and tops starts to bubble making craters, flip the hotcakes and cook until the remaining sides have browned. Re-oil the griddle and repeat the steps for the next batch of pancakes.

"South Pass Saddle Blankets"

(Classic Sourdough Hot Cakes)

- 2 cups of "proofed" sourdough batter
- 6 oz. beer (1/2 can)
- 3/4 cup milk (try half buttermilk)

- 1/4 tspn. salt
- 1 tblspn. sugar
- 1/2 tspn. baking soda
- 2 tspn. baking powder
- 3 eggs
- 1-3/4 cup all-purpose flour

To make “South Pass Saddle Blankets” (sourdough hot cakes), stir the mixture – don’t whip it. Allow it to thicken and “rest” for 20 minutes. A griddle is heated perfectly for hot cakes at 375 degrees F. Sprinkle a few drops of water on it. If they dance around... start cookin’! Wipe a thin coating of oil onto the griddle then “polish” it with a paper towel. Pour the batter onto the hot griddle to make hot cakes and reach for the maple or chokecherry syrup (see the recipe below). Careful now... don’t cook pancakes too quickly.

“Boot Hill Buckwheats”

Buckwheat “Flapjacks”

Do you know the difference between a pancake and a flapjack? No difference, you say? Who cares? – now please pass the syrup! Actually, a flapjack is larger (sometimes a foot in diameter), thinner, and crisper than a regular pancake.

I’ll bet you think buckwheat is a grain! Actually, it is the seed of a plant much like rhubarb. The groats are cooked almost like rice and the flour makes fine hotcakes. Buckwheat groats come from a plant that is not a grass and is not related to wheat. When the hulls are removed from its groats, a subtle, earthy, flour is produced – and it’s a natural for making buckwheat flapjacks. Sometimes raised with yeast, they are light and foamy with a mild, mushroom-like taste.

This is an old Mormon Pioneer recipe, originating in Vermont and first brought to the west in 1847. Mix the combined dry ingredients with the milk and eggs. Fold the shortening into the mixture until it becomes blended and smooth.

- 2/3 cup white flour
- 1/3 cup wheat flour
- 1/3 cup buckwheat flour
- 3 tspns. baking powder
- 3 tblspns. sugar
- 3/4 tspn. salt
- 3 eggs (beaten)
- 1-1/4 cups milk
- 3 tblspns. bacon drippings or melted shortening

Stir the mixture until it blends well but don’t over mix it. Allow it to thicken and “rest” for 20 minutes. A griddle is heated perfectly for hot cakes at 375 degrees F. Sprinkle a few drops of water on it. If they dance around... start cookin’! Wipe a thin coating of oil onto the griddle then “polish” it with a paper towel or any ol’ used saddleblanket. Pour the batter onto the hot griddle to make hot cakes and reach for “Chuckwagon Chokecherry Syrup”. Careful... don’t cook buckwheats too quickly. And for goodness sakes... try this recipe with “proofed” sourdough batter” as in the recipe above.

How To Make Chuckwagon’s Braggin’ n’ Gaggin’ Chokecherry syrup:

To make chokecherry juice for syrup, boil a pint of chokecherries in just enough water to cover them and cook them until the berries are mushy. Next, wring the berries through cheesecloth or strain them

through a sieve. To make chokecherry syrup, mix 2 cups chokecherry juice, with 3 cups of sugar, in 1/2 cup of light corn syrup. Simmer the ingredients over low heat fifteen minutes until the syrup has thickened.

I really hope you try these recipes and discover the magic of sourdough. It's the perfect complement for good sausage!

And don't forget the... "Sourdough Rye" bread. We call it, "Swallow Canyon Sourdough".

Rye And Mold

In October 1692, Massachusetts's citizens slowly crushed to death an 80-year-old woman by "stoning" her in Salem's town square over the period of two days. Her crime? Accused of being a witch, she failed to enter a plea in court. As trials ended, a hundred and forty-nine other people had been accused of crimes. Nineteen people were hanged while four others died in prison! What caused this cryptic mass hysterical behavior? Religious zealotry? Ignorance? Could it have been Encephalitis spread by mosquitoes, or perhaps Huntington's Chorea?

Linda Caporael is a psychologist at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, New York. Doctor Caporael is convinced the culpability belongs to *claviceps purpurea* – ergot fungus found in rye grain. "What's the big deal?" someone asked her. The "big deal" is simply this: Ergot fungus alkaloids include lysergic acid. You know... the stuff from which LSD is made! – the "far out" drug of choice of America's seventy's hallucinogenic hippies. Ergot affects multiple grains and grasses, but rye, the staple grain of the settling citizens of Salem, is particularly vulnerable to developing the fungus as it thrives in warm, damp, rainy environments. The initial signs of ergot poisoning, called "ergotism", include gastrointestinal upset followed by burning and itching of the skin. Later, convulsions, hallucinations and psychosis are suffered – precisely the symptoms displayed by Salem's citizenry. Outbreaks of ergotism are nothing new. "St. Anthony's Fire", as it was known in medieval times, poisoned entire villages of people and as late as 1951, ergot poisoning afflicted two hundred and fifty villagers of Pont-Saint-Esprit, France, where several died!

Wheat Flour

I suppose many people who make their own bread, as I decidedly do, shake their heads and shudder when they see others placing bleached "white bread" into their shopping baskets at a grocery store. The fact remains, white flour is still used traditionally, and almost exclusively in many cultures throughout the modern world. In the United States, it certainly still remains the preferred flour for bread making.

Ground wheat has a slightly yellow hue. No big deal. Why then, do manufacturers whiten it subjecting it to organic acetone peroxide, benzoyl peroxide, nitrogen dioxide, chlorine, or other yummy, tasty, and dynamic chemicals added to "help build strong bodies twelve different ways"? Enriched flour has specific nutrients returned to it that were lost being processed to make it white! According to the Food And Drug Administration, a pound of enriched flour must have 2.9 milligrams of thiamin, 1.8 milligrams of riboflavin, 24 milligrams of niacin, 0.7 milligrams of folic acid, and 20 milligrams of iron. A minimum of 960 milligrams of B vitamins and calcium per pound must also be added. So, why then, do we "bleach" flour to begin with? Why would anyone purposely remove the nutrients from flour, and then "enrich" it by replacing them? Allow me. It turns out that bleaching flour is not some money-making scheme or hoax invented by baking companies. During the late Middle Ages, many world cultures adopted white flour (mistakenly believing it was healthier than dark flour) when several diseases were virtually eliminated by bleaching and processing. Unknown to the masses of the time period, molds and fungi

present in grains – especially ergot in rye – was to blame for much sickness and death! Bleaching wheat flour had refined it, eradicating the effects of poisonous molds. Today's rye is inspected and processed carefully. Although there is much less of it than in the past, I can't give it up, can you? It's just too doggone tasty to even think about leaving off my sauerkraut sandwiches!

Best Wishes,
Chuckwagon