Bread & baking / France

Pain de Campagne

A classic French country loaf with a burnished flour-dusted crust that shatters at the first cut — mild tang from the sourdough, an open and irregular crumb threaded with the nuttiness of whole wheat and rye.

Time 1080 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 100 % Bread flour (T65 or 12% protein)
- ☐ 18 % Whole wheat flour
- ☐ 8 % Dark rye flour (T170)
- ☐ 72 % Cool water (22 C)
- ☐ 20 % Active sourdough starter (100% hydration)
- ☐ 2 % Fine sea salt

Let's make it.

01 Combine all three flours in a large bowl and whisk briefly to distribute the whole wheat and rye evenly through the bread flour. Add the cool water and mix with wet hands or a stiff spatula until no dry flour remains. The dough will be rough and shaggy — wetter than a simple white loaf because the whole grain flours will continue absorbing water. Cover tightly and rest 45 minutes. No starter, no salt yet. This autolyse allows the whole-grain particles to fully hydrate and the gluten to begin organizing without agitation.

02 Pour the active starter over the autolyse dough; scatter the salt on top. Perform a lamination fold: wet the work surface lightly, spread the dough into a thin rectangle, fold into thirds, then into thirds the other way, gathering it back into the bowl. Follow with one set of stretch-and-folds to fully incorporate everything. The dough will initially feel slack and slippery as the starter makes it wetter — this is correct. The salt will tighten it over the next few hours.

03 Cover the bowl. Over the next 4 hours, perform four sets of stretch-and-folds, one set every 45–60 minutes. After the last set, leave undisturbed for 1–2 more hours until the bulk is complete. Total bulk fermentation: 5–6 hours at 21–23 C. The pain de campagne benefits from a longer, cooler bulk than a pure white sourdough — the whole grain flours create more complex enzymatic activity and the rye contributes to a mild, approachable tang.

04 Gently tip the bulk dough onto a lightly floured surface. Pre-shape into a round by folding the edges to the center, then flipping seam-side down. Rest uncovered 20 minutes. Final shape: flip, stretch gently to an oval, fold both sides to center, roll toward you with hands tucked under to build surface tension. For the traditional pain de campagne look, place seam-side down in a banneton heavily dusted with a mix of flour and rye flour. Cold-proof in the refrigerator 10–14 hours. Before baking, dust the top of the loaf (which will be the bottom in the banneton) with more rye flour — it creates the characteristic floury crust.

05 Preheat a Dutch oven at 250 C (480 F) for 45 minutes. Score the cold loaf with a lame: one central slash or a cross-hatch pattern. Lower into the Dutch oven and bake covered 20 minutes, then uncovered at 220 C (425 F) for 25–30 minutes until the crust is deeply burnished with lighter flour-dusted patches (where the banneton flour didn't caramelize). The rye flour in the crust stays matte and pale against the darker bread flour — this contrast is the visual signature of a pain de campagne.

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Servings are an estimate; check quantities in the source recipe.
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