Bread & baking / United States

Sourdough Sandwich Loaf

A soft, Pullman-style American sandwich loaf leavened entirely by an active sourdough starter — tender enough to slice thin for toast yet tangy enough that you taste the ferment on the back of every bite. The crumb is pillowy and close-knit, the crust thin and golden, and the whole kitchen smells like a proper bakery for hours.

Time 1080 min **Servings** 4

What you'll need.

- ☐ 100 % Bread flour (12–13% protein)
- ☐ 72 % Warm water (30–34 C)
- ☐ 20 % Active sourdough starter (100% hydration, fed 8h ago)
- ☐ 2 % Fine sea salt
- ☐ 5 % Unsalted butter, softened
- ☐ 3 % Honey

Let's make it.

01 Combine the flour, water, active starter, and honey in a large bowl. Stir with a wooden spoon or dough whisk until no dry flour remains. The dough will be rough and sticky — resist the urge to add more flour. Cover with a damp towel and let it rest (autolyse) for 30 minutes. This rest allows the flour to fully hydrate and gluten to begin forming without any kneading, which reduces mixing time significantly and improves the crumb structure. Check that your starter is truly active: it should have doubled since feeding and smell yeasty and pleasantly sour.

02 Sprinkle the salt over the rested dough and squeeze it through the dough with your fingers until evenly distributed — about 2 minutes of aggressive squeezing. Add the softened butter in small pieces and continue squeezing and folding until fully absorbed. Perform stretch-and-folds: wet your hand, grab the far edge of the dough, stretch it up overhead without tearing, and fold it over the center. Rotate 90 degrees and repeat — 4 folds equals one round. Do 4 rounds total, spaced 30 minutes apart, over 2 hours. By the final round the dough should be smooth, strong, and clearly elastic.

03 Transfer the dough to a lightly oiled container and bulk-ferment at room temperature (21–24 C) for 8–10 hours, or overnight in the refrigerator (4 C) for 12–14 hours. The cold retard slows fermentation and develops deeper sour flavor — for a tangier loaf, always go cold. The dough is ready when it has grown by 50–75% in volume (not doubled, as sourdough is slower), feels lighter and jiggly, and small bubbles are visible along the sides and bottom of the container. Dimples pressed into the surface spring back slowly and lazily.

04 Turn the dough onto an unfloured surface. Gently pat it into a rectangle roughly the length of your loaf pan. Fold the long sides in toward the center like a letter, then roll it tightly from the top, sealing the seam with your thumbs as you go. You want surface tension without degassing the crumb — firm but not aggressive rolling. Lower the log seam-side down into a well-greased 9x5 inch (23x13 cm) loaf pan. The dough should fill the pan about 60–65% and sit slightly below the rim.

05 Cover the pan with oiled plastic wrap and proof at room temperature (21–24 C) for 3–5 hours, or until the dome of the dough crests about 2 cm above the rim of the pan. If you retarded the bulk in the fridge, the final proof will take the longer end of this range. You can also do a cold final proof overnight in the fridge for baking the next morning — pull it directly from the fridge into the oven. Thirty minutes before baking, preheat the oven to 200 C (400 F).

06 Score a shallow slash down the center of the loaf (optional but gives the crust a controlled split). Bake at 200 C (400 F) for 35–40 minutes, covering the pan loosely with foil for the first 20 minutes to keep the crust from browning too fast before the crumb sets. Remove the foil and continue baking until the internal temperature reads 93–96 C (200–205 F) and the top is a rich golden brown. Let cool in the pan 10 minutes, then turn out onto a wire rack. Do not slice for at least 1 hour — the crumb continues to set as the bread cools.

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