

DOUGH MONSTER!

Genuine sourdough bread is made to rise using only a starter culture of yeasts and 'friendly' lactic acid bacteria. These live all around us, including on the surface of cereal grains, so they end up in flour. Here's how to nurture them to become your very own living, burping, breadmaking buddy.

Ingredients

Flour and tap water. That's all. You might get better results with wholemeal flour as on the bran is where more microbes hang out. Rye flour tends to work really well.

A plastic container with a press-on lid makes a good lair for your dough monster. If it gets a bit frisky, the lid will simply pop open.

Days one to five (ish)

Each day, drop equal weights of flour and water (say 30g of each) into your container, mix, pop the lid on and leave at room temperature (about 18-20°C) for 24 hours. Some bakers call this feeding or refreshing. For the first few days, the mixture might seem lifeless and could smell vinegary or even a bit iffy. Don't worry about this as it should soon start bubbling and the aroma should improve.

Day six (ish)

Keep up the daily feeds until your dough monster is burping and bubbling nicely. This usually takes from about four to seven or ten days. You can then use some of it to make sourdough bread according to your chosen recipe.

Caring for your dough monster

It's a living thing (well, technically, billions of living things) but unlike pets or other members of your household, it can be left to its own devices in for the fridge. You just need to take it out and refresh it on the day before a sourdough session.

Don't worry if the flour settles, leaving a layer of brownish liquid on top - this is just gravity doing its thing. You can either stir the liquid back into your starter, though it's probably better to pour it off.

If your dough monster has been napping in the fridge for yonks, you might need to pour some away and start refreshments a few days before a baking session. If it's been months or years, then scoop a spoonful from the bottom into a new container and start the refreshments. It should be match fit again in a few days.

If you leave your monster out at room temperature, it will need refreshing at least once a day, so best not to unless you're baking every day or so.

What's your dough monster called?

Names we've seen include Ayeasta Franklin, Bread Pitt, Bao Tse Tung, Bread Sheeran, Clint Yeastwood, Olivia Gluten John, Scooby Dough, and Shah Rukh Naan.

Sourdough snaps

If it's okay for you to post photos of your starter and bread on social media, use #sourdough, #doughmonster, #RealBread, #RealBreadCampaign and (during the ninth month) #SourdoughSeptember. You can find us on Facebook and Instagram as @realbreadcampaign

Virtual bread

You can find free recipes, information about sourdough, sourfaux and a load more stuff on the Real Bread Campaign website. That includes the Real Bread Map of places to buy bread when not making your own. www.realbreadcampaign.org

