

How to Make Desem Starter & Bread

Autumn Rose

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Starting Your Desem & the First Loaf

Day 1:

1. Grind up 30 C (10 lbs) fresh flour. Dump into container of choice. Tall is better than wide.
2. Take 2 C flour from your container and mix it with 1/2-3/4 C room temp water. Knead for 5 minutes. Dough should be stiff.
3. Roll into ball and stash in the middle of flour.
4. Cover with lid and set in a place that ranges between 50-65F to achieve the right bacteria.

Day 2:

Don't disturb.

Day 3-5

1. Remove dough ball from bucket of flour. It should have a dry, tough skin.
2. Remove dry skin, peeling as you would an orange. The inside should be soft and textured.
3. In small bowl, make a dough by mixing 1 C flour (from bucket) and approx 1/3 C water.
4. When done mixing, rip up desem starter and dough into pieces.
5. Knead for several minutes, until lumps disappear. As you knead, dough will become stickier and easier to knead. When this point is reached, stop kneading.
6. Plop dough back into the middle of bucket and bury it mid-way once again.
7. In this 3-5 day window it should begin showing signs of fermentation and begin developing a slightly fermented, earthy odor.

Day 6:

1. Remove the starter from bucket of flour and remove the tough, dry skin.

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2. In bowl, mix 1 C flour and $\frac{1}{2}$ C water. Knead into desem starter as before, but this time, don't replace in the container of flour.
3. Instead, place dough in a bowl and cover with a lid.
4. Return container of flour *and* the bowl with starter to the cool location.
5. Let starter set for 24 hrs.

Day 7-Part 1

1. Mix together 1 C fresh flour with $\frac{1}{2}$ C water. Add desem starter from bowl, kneading until dough becomes easier to knead and is slightly sticky.
2. Form a round ball and cut it into quarters.
3. Take one quarter and round it off. Return to the bowl but this time, leave it on the counter top for 8-12 hrs.
4. What should you do with the extra $\frac{3}{4}$ bit of dough? See the [blog post](#) for more information!

Day 7-Part 11

1. When 8-12 hrs have passed, combine 1 C flour with $\frac{1}{2}$ C water. Knead together as before.
2. Return to the container of flour and keep in cool temperatures.
3. Every day, for the next 5 days, repeat the above process: 1 C flour to $\frac{1}{2}$ C water combined with the dough in the container of flour.
4. Once you have completed day 5, your starter is ready for baking your first, real desem loaf!

Maintaining & Caring for a Desem Starter

- You must maintain a mature starter. Feeding it 1 C fresh flour + $\frac{1}{2}$ C water 2x per week is essential.
- If you forget for a week? Don't sweat it, but be sure to feed your desem starter at least 3x the next week to bring it back up to full strength.
- If perchance it develops an 'off' odor or grows mold, toss both it *and* all the flour. Sanitize the container before re-using it.
- For the best results, the last feeding should always be 12 hrs before using it in baking.
- Going away? Ask a friend to babysit it while you are gone. Grind the flour and clearly write out the instructions needed. Who knows? Perhaps you'll spark *their* interest.

Baking with Mature Desem Starter

The process is simple, but its also an art. Don't give up if your first attempt goes wrong! Your climate, the strength of natural yeasts, your bake ware and even the humidity will all affect your success. Keep trying and looking to understand this unusual bread. It will be worthwhile in the end!

Mature Desem Bread

Ingredients:

- 4 C flour
- 2 tsp salt
- 1 3/4 C desem starter
- 1 3/4 C water

Directions: use desem that was fed 12-14 hours prior to bread making.

1. Quickly mix together a dough with flour, salt and water.
2. Knead desem into the dough until it softens.
3. Finished dough should be slightly sticky and shiny.
4. Place in a bowl that allows room for expansion
5. Slightly warm the oven and place bowl full of dough in it.
6. Wring out a hot, wet cloth and spread over bowl. Moisture will help it rise!
7. Let it rest for 3 hours.
8. When time is up, deflate dough leaving the bottom side intact, fold edges over and pressing in.
9. Using the sliding technique, seal the dough ball on bottom and sides.
10. Make certain baking dish with lid has been greased. Sprinkle with cornmeal if desired and place dough in it.
11. Once again, lightly warm oven and place dough inside (without lid) for 2 hours.
12. Run a hot cloth under hot water and place it on the rack below the bread.
13. After 2 hours, poke several holes in top of bread or slash the loaf. Sprinkle water over the top, secure with lid and set in preheated (450F) oven. Note: If cooking with clay or stoneware, place in oven and *then* turn up heat. Allow more time for cooking.
14. Bake at 450F until loaf browns on top. Reduce to 350F and finish off.
15. Bread can be removed when a deep gold or red-brown. Remove from pan and tap the bottom. If hollow sounding, bread is done!