HANDMADE IN OXFORDSHIRE

How to Make a Sourdough Starter from Scratch

A simple day-by-day guide — the way I made Nelly

I've fallen in love with sourdough. My starter is called Nelly. This is the method I used to bring her to life from scratch — slow, simple and steady. Take your time, and she'll get there.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

You'll need

- Very strong, high-protein white bread flour (13% protein or more)
- Filtered or bottled water, at room temperature
- A clean glass jar with a loose lid
- A spoon, digital scales and an elastic band

Why filtered or bottled water? Tap water can contain chlorine, which slows the yeast down. Stick to filtered or bottled water all the way through.

Where she lives: keep your jar somewhere warm — around 22–26°C. Put the lid on loosely (never airtight).

GETTING STARTED

Days 1 to 4

Each day, add **25g water** and **25g flour** to the jar. Mix until there's no dry flour left, scrape down the sides, mark the level with the elastic band, and put the lid on loosely.

EACH DAY · DAYS 1–4

25g filtered or bottled water + 25g high-protein bread flour
No discard yet — just add on top and mix well.

In the first couple of days you may see a few bubbles, or nothing at all. Both are fine. Keep going.

FROM DAY 5 ONWARDS

The feeding stages

From day 5 you start discarding and feeding. Move to the next stage only when your starter has **doubled in size for 3 days in a row**. Try to feed at roughly the same time each day.

Important: throw the discard in the bin. You can't bake with discard until your starter is active and ready. Never pour it down the sink — it can block the pipes.

STAGE	STARTER	WATER	FLOUR	MOVE ON WHEN
Days 1–4 · no discard	—	25g	25g	After day 4
Stage 1 · 1:1:1	25g	25g	25g	Doubles 3 days in a row
Stage 2 · 1:2:2	25g	50g	50g	Doubles 3 days in a row
Stage 3 · 1:3:3	25g	75g	75g	Doubles 3 days in a row
Stage 4 · 1:5:5 final build	25g	125g	125g	Doubles 3 days in a row

STAGE 1 1:1:1

Keep 25g starter · add 25g water + 25g flour

Throw the rest in the bin. Mix well, scrape the sides, mark the level, lid on loosely. Repeat every day until she doubles three days in a row.

STAGE 2 1:2:2

25g starter · 50g water · 50g flour

Same rhythm: discard down to 25g, feed, mark the level. Keep going until she doubles three days in a row.

STAGE 3 1:3:3 · building endurance

25g starter · 75g water · 75g flour

You're building her strength now. Carry on until she doubles for three days or more in a row.

STAGE 4 1:5:5 · final build

25g starter · 125g water · 125g flour

She should start smelling sweet. Keep going until she doubles for three days or more in a row — then you're ready to bake.

WHAT'S NORMAL

Helpful hints

Starters can smell and look a bit odd along the way. Here's what I look out for.

Days 1–3 · odd smells	It can smell like cheese, old socks or sick. That's just early bacteria — it settles down. Keep feeding.
Big rise, then quiet	A big rise around day 2 or 3, then it goes quiet, is very common. That isn't yeast yet. Keep going.
Nail varnish / acetone	She's hungry. Feed her — and if it keeps happening, feed twice a day for a few days.
Grey or dark liquid (hooch)	Also a sign of hunger. Pour it off (or stir it in), then feed and carry on.
Sluggish or slow	Move her somewhere warmer. Double-check you're using filtered or bottled water and very strong high-protein flour.
Mark the level	Put the elastic band on after every feed so you can see clearly whether she's doubled.
Mould	Fuzzy spots, or pink, orange or red streaks, mean she's gone off. Throw her away and start again with a clean jar.

YOU'RE READY TO BAKE WHEN

She reliably doubles within about 4–8 hours of a feed

- She's full of bubbles
- She smells pleasantly sour and sweet — a bit like yoghurt or beer
- A small spoonful floats in a glass of water (the float test)
- She's doubled for 3 days or more in a row on the final 1:5:5 build

Once she's ready, you can keep her in the fridge between bakes, and take her out to feed before you bake again.

Happy baking — and look after your starter.

Hayley x

TICK AS YOU GO

Daily starter tracker

Print this page and keep it by your jar. Note the stage you're on, whether she doubled, and how she smells.

Stage: Days 1–4 · 1:1:1 · 1:2:2 · 1:3:3 · 1:5:5 (circle the one you're on)

DAY	FEED (G)	DOUBLED?	SMELL / NOTES
1		☐ Y ☐ N	
2		☐ Y ☐ N	
3		☐ Y ☐ N	
4		☐ Y ☐ N	
5		☐ Y ☐ N	
6		☐ Y ☐ N	
7		☐ Y ☐ N	
8		☐ Y ☐ N	
9		☐ Y ☐ N	
10		☐ Y ☐ N	
11		☐ Y ☐ N	
12		☐ Y ☐ N	
13		☐ Y ☐ N	
14		☐ Y ☐ N	
15		☐ Y ☐ N	
16		☐ Y ☐ N	
17		☐ Y ☐ N	
18		☐ Y ☐ N	
19		☐ Y ☐ N	
20		☐ Y ☐ N	
21		☐ Y ☐ N	

Tip: when she has doubled three days in a row, circle the next stage above and keep going.