What you’ll need . . .

» Flour, unbleached
» Water, untreated or filtered

Don’t be intimidated by the hype about sourdough. Pioneers did not take 450-page books on crafting sourdough on their migratory journeys. Or if they did, you can bet those books were the first things to be left behind at a difficult river crossing. Wild yeast is tough. It will survive in your fridge for at least four weeks; you can dry it on a wooden spoon and mail it to friends, and it will revive with water and food. Of course, there can be a huge amount of artistry involved in baking with sourdough, but it’s still just an ingredient like any other. I’m no master baker, and my bread is certainly not as good as the loaves I hear you can get at Tartine Bakery in San Francisco. But it’s still pretty darn delicious! —Susan DeBolt

Important Note: Use unbleached flour. Seriously. Bleach will kill your yeast. Likewise, city tap water is treated to combat organisms like yeast. If you have well water, you may be able to use it from the tap. Try it and see!

Less Important, But Still Useful Note: It is said that measuring flour by weight rather than by volume is more accurate. I find throwing everything into a bowl on a scale is just easier. That said, don’t invest in a kitchen scale just to try making sourdough. Wait and see how it goes.

Day One:
Getting Started
Beat together 4 oz. (⅝ cup) unbleached flour (white, wheat, whatever), and 4 oz. (½ cup) untreated or filtered water. Pour into vessel and loosely cover. I use a quart mason jar. Keep in a warm place, the top of the fridge works great, for 12–24 hours.

Before First Feeding

Day Two:
First Feeding
Discard half the starter. Beat together 4 oz. all-purpose flour and 4 oz. water. Add remaining starter and beat again. Pour into loosely covered vessel and return to warm place for 24 hours.
**Day Three to Day Five**  
Repeat feeding as explained in day two instructions once a day. You will know when the starter is ready. It will be bubbly, and a spoonful dropped into water will float.

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**“Fed” vs. “Unfed” Starter**

“Fed” starter is active and ready to give some leavening power to your baking. “Unfed” starter has little to no leavening power, but still contains good flour and water, and is sourdough-flavored. Whether you are frugal or just like a sourdough taste, there are many recipes for “unfed” starter that either have no need for leavening, or use other agents. Sourdough pizza crust is my favorite. Just google “unfed sourdough recipes” for lots of great ideas.

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**Care and Feeding**

If you don’t bake every day, and I don’t know anyone who does, you don’t need to keep your starter on the counter and feed it every day. The following is my maintenance process:
1. The night before baking, take the starter out of the fridge.
2. Pour off any alcohol (yellow liquid) that has formed.
3. Prepare 8–10 oz. of starter food depending on the requirements of your recipe.
5. Save the remaining starter in a separate jar and refrigerate for an “unfed” recipe.
6. Pour the new batch into a clean jar, cover, and leave on the counter overnight.
7. Before using your starter to bake, prepare 8 oz. of starter food, mix in ¼ cup starter, pour into clean jar and allow to recover on counter before refrigerating.