

[Brandywine Table]

Kneading Comfort

DURING A TIME OF UNCERTAINTY, THE AGE-OLD CRAFT OF BREADMAKING IS ON THE RISE.

Alyssa Thayer

MARCH 2020 MARKED THE START OF THE GLOBAL pandemic, and with it, a seismic shift in the way we conduct our lives. We went from eating out and traveling, to being cooped up at home.

The silver lining of this new reality was time, and the opportunity to return to pastimes that had all but vanished from our frenzied lives. Breadmaking, in particular, became so ubiquitous that flour and yeast shortages plagued grocery shelves, and photos of homemade loaves took over our social media feeds.

It seems that beyond the gratification of making something from scratch, folks have found something truly cathartic about the bread-making process. "It makes you use all your senses in a slow and quiet way," says Mark Doberenz, owner of **Green Lion Breads**, a nonprofit micro-bakery in Phoenixville.

Mark first learned to bake 15 years ago, as a social therapist at a Camphill Community in upstate New York. These communities integrate young adults with disabilities with full-time residents and their families. He refers to his first few times baking bread as 'religious experiences' and credits the therapeutic setting with keeping him grounded and teaching him how to work with people of all abilities.

He kept perfecting his craft and eventually moved his family to Camphill Soltane where he helped open the popular Soltane Cafe in

Green Lion stays true to its social mission of creating an inclusive environment for individuals with intellectual and developmental differences. Pictured here, Nathaniel Poly (left) and their lead baker Brendan Graham (right), both of whom helped found Green Lion Breads.



"Bread gives you an invitation to a long friendship," says Mark Doberenz, owner of Green Lion Breads. Seen here circa 2014, next a wood-fired oven he worked out of for Camphill Soltane. 15 years into his love affair with bread baking he says the learning continues each day.

downtown Phoenixville. The café was the first off-campus enterprise of Camphill Soltane, providing inclusive professional development opportunities for members of their community.

"Growing up, bread was bread and flour was flour," Mark admits. But somewhere along his baking journey, he cultivated a deep appreciation for the ingredients.

Four years ago, Mark opened Green Lion Breads, with the vision of baking artisan loaves and milling his own local flours. "We're milling spelt from a quarter mile away and baking with it the next day," he says proudly.

As anyone who's tried their hand at sourdough can tell you: flour matters! The wild flora and fauna of the grain is what create and feed the culture. And the more a flour has been stripped of nutrients (think bleached white flour) or has sat on a shelf, the less it has to offer. "Our grains are alive," boasts Mark, describing the difference between his offerings and generic sacks of all-purpose flour.

Although breadmaking can feel intimidating, Mark reminds us all that it couldn't be simpler: flour, water, salt. "There is patience involved," he admits. "You just need to commit to the path."

You can purchase Green Lion bread and their freshly milled flour online and pick it up at various community locations including the Devon Yards Farmer's Market.



"Grains make the bread," declares Mark. Green Lion specializes in ancient grains such as einkorn and spelt, which tout greater nutrients and flavor than their generic wheat counterparts.

Ancient Grain Sourdough

The spelt and einkorn bread is a favorite at Green Lion Breads, offering ease of digestion and wonderful flavor. This bread can be made with whole-grain einkorn or spelt flour or a half-and-half combination. This recipe assumes your sourdough starter has been 'refreshed,' brought to room temperature and fed at least once before using.



Sourdough Feed

½ C. einkorn/spelt whole grain flour (50 grams)
¼ C. + ⅛ C. filtered or well water (30 grams)
1 Tb. sourdough starter (10 grams)

Full Mix

1 tsp. + ⅛ tsp. sea salt (9 grams)
3¾ C. einkorn/spelt whole grain flour (437 grams)
1½ C. + ⅛ C. filtered or well water (75°F) (350 grams)
⅓ C. sourdough starter (remember to save a small amount to keep culture going)

Culture Feed (to be done the night before baking)

8-12 hours before mixing, incorporate starter and other "feed" ingredients. Cover and let it sit out and ferment in a warm spot (in the mid-70s is optimal).

Mix:

After 8-12 hours of fermentation, you're ready to begin the mix. In a large bowl, incorporate salt into flour and set aside. In a separate bowl, mix additional water into sourdough. Add watery sourdough to the flour and salt mixture.

With one wet hand, mix by stirring and squeezing dough through fingers. Turn the bowl with your other hand as you do this for one minute. The dough will be shaggy and wet and not smooth.

Rest 15 minutes.

Stretch/Folding Sequence

Wet one hand and gently fold the edges of the dough by grabbing an underneath section of the dough at the 12 o'clock position and

There's something about sourdough

Besides the apparent yeast shortage from the home-baking boom, there are other great reasons to try sourdough starter. The depth and complexity of flavor are unparalleled, and it actually predigests the grains, making sourdough bread more nutritious and easier to digest.

Here are the basics about sourdough starter:

What is it? Sourdough "starter" or "seed" is a live culture that's fermented using natural bacteria and yeast present in your environment. The starter allows bread (and other leavened sourdough products) to rise without using commercial yeast.

What can you use it for? In addition to bread, the starter can also be used to make delicious doughy pancakes, biscuits, pizza dough and even soft pretzels.

Where do you get it? Depending on your sense of bread-venture, you can start from scratch, buy a dried starter mix, or ask for a small portion of someone else's starter. Some of the oldest starters have been passed down for generations! *Note: Mark's is 8 years old.*

How do you make it? The basic premise couldn't be simpler: Mix 1:1 ratios (by weight) of water and flour in a wide-mouth jar or crock to start. Many recipes recommend leaving the top off for a few hours to allow the yeasts and bacteria from the air to enter the mixture.

How do you maintain it? That's right folks, it's alive and falls somewhere between houseplant and pet in terms of neediness. Once activated, the starter must be fed regularly. Frequency of feedings depends on warmth of the environment. In its early days, a starter will need to be fed daily or perhaps twice a day. Later, it can be moved to the fridge and fed weekly.

Mark's Tip: When using it out of the fridge, it needs to be reactivated. Take it out and feed at least 2 times before adding it to a recipe.

How to deal with discard? A portion of the starter is discarded each time it's fed. It may seem wasteful, but maintaining an ever-growing starter would quickly become a drain of resources and counter space. Good news: you can use the starter discard in other recipes, like the soft pretzel recipe, next page.

How do you get good quality? Starters do best on whole-grain flours such as rye, varietal wheat and spelt. Admittedly, these can get expensive, so one option is to combine whole grain and all-purpose flour as you go.

- Starter does not like bleached flour or chlorinated water.
- Purists recommend a digital kitchen scale. But you can find recipes that translate weight ratios into approximate volume (cups and tablespoons) measurements.
- If mold appears, ditch the whole thing. It's painful because it equates to time and resources, but it's better than making yourself or others sick!

If you see a dark liquid form on top—called hooch—just pour it off and feed your culture. It's hangry!

Full step-by-step instructions from The Clever Carrot are online, TheCleverCarrot.com.

stretching up and over to the middle without ripping. Press down gently to hold in place. Do this at 3, 6 and 9 o'clock positions as well. Repeat this folding sequence two times. Then flip the dough over so the smooth side is up.

The dough is starting to develop and will ferment for an additional 3 hours.

Repeat the folding technique in 1 hour and then again at the 2-hour mark.

At hour 3, prepare a 9" x 5" loaf pan by brushing the sides and bottom with oil.

Stretch and fold at 12, 3, 6 and 9 o'clock positions again. Now stretch and fold at 12 and 6 again. Then flip over onto seam to maintain the shape.

With two wet hands, pick up and set into the bread pan seam side down.

Proof

Proof for 2 hours, protecting the top from direct air by covering with a big bowl or sprinkling flour and covering with a linen towel.

With 30 minutes left of proofing, preheat oven, with a rack in the lower middle, to 450°. Put a cookie sheet or shallow pan underneath this rack to be used for steaming.

Once the 2 hours of proofing is completed, the dough should be domed. This assumes it has been fermenting at 75-78°. If you are in a cooler space, wait an additional 30 minutes. If it's warmer, you may need to put it in the oven 30 minutes earlier.

Put the bread in the center of the middle rack and pour 2 cups of water into your preheated shallow pan that's below the loaf.

Close the door! Turn the oven down to 435° and bake for 40 minutes.

Let the loaf rest for 30 minutes for good slicing or 15 if you want it to melt the pad of butter you have smothered onto it. Yum!

Makes one 9" x 5" loaf.

Sourdough Scrap Soft Pretzels

Given our proximity to Philly, we had to include at least one soft pretzel recipe. Use your sourdough starter discard and reinvent it into a crowd-pleasing snack. P.S. This is a great recipe to make as a family—everyone gets to pick their own toppings!

**Adapted from Foodie With a Family.*

Dough:

1 C. whole wheat flour
3 C. all-purpose flour
½ tsp. fine salt
1 Tb. granulated sugar
2 tsp. instant yeast
2¼ C. whole milk
½ C. sourdough discard

Pretzel Boil Solution:

8 C. water

Mark's Tips and Tools for home bakers:

1. Never use a mixer at home. Mark uses hand stretching and folding techniques for his home breads.

2. Get to know your temperatures. Dough likes warmer spots, on average around 78°. Find the best spot in your house to help it thrive ... And that might not even be the kitchen!

3. Bread likes steam. If you want soft loft loaves with a crusty exterior, make sure the loaf has moisture while it bakes. One method is to bake your loaf in a crock or Dutch oven with the top on for half the baking time, then remove the lid for the final minutes to get a golden crust.

4. Keep your dough moist. Moisture is essential for the fermentation and rise. You can always add more flour but it is very hard to bring back an overly dry dough. Aim for a smooth and just slightly tacky consistency.

5. Tips for storing the goods. True whole grain bread will last longer than white bread but nearly as long as grocery sandwich bread. Mark recommends leaving artisan loaves in a paper bag the first two days, then switching to plastic to keep it from hardening. If you know you have extra, slice and freeze half and take it out piece by piece for toast.

Key Tools:

- **Pastry scraper** – Not expensive and worth every penny, this little handheld blade is a must for getting dough off the kneading surface.
- **Proofing basket** – Great for letting your dough rise and shape, but if you don't have one, just line a bowl or other basket with a floured kitchen towel.
- **Bread/Pizza stone or cloche** – This isn't essential for the beginner, but their radiant heat becomes important for hearth (read: non-loaf pan) breads.

- 2 Tb. baking soda

Toppings:

- Course salt
- Everything bagel seasoning
- Cinnamon and sugar
- Coconut oil and shreds
- Shredded Parmesan cheese
- Make up your own!

Mix by Hand:

Start by whisking flour, salt, sugar and yeast in a large bowl.

Stir in sourdough starter and milk until the mixture gathers and forms a soft dough.

Place dough onto a floured surface and knead gently for 10 minutes, adding flour when dough starts sticking too much.

Using a Mixer:

Start by mixing flour, salt, sugar and yeast in a mixer bowl. Make sure dough hook attachment is on before adding sourdough starter and milk.

Miracle No-Knead Bread

It's okay to tiptoe into the world of bread baking with a simple no-knead recipe. We won't tell, but you might . . . once you take your Insta-worthy boule out of the oven.

**Adapted from Pinch of Yum.*



- 1 tsp. yeast
- 2 C. warm water
- 1½ tsp. fine salt
- 3 C. whole wheat flour
- 1 C. all-purpose flour

Mix yeast, warm water and salt well until dissolved. Stir in one cup of flour at a time, pausing after the third to make sure the dough is fully mixed. Then slowly incorporating the final cup to find the desired texture. The dough should be moist and tacky, but not loose or watery. It should just barely hold its shape and be spongy.

Note: The type of flour and humidity contribute to needing more or less flour, so try to use its texture to gauge.

Place plastic wrap over the bowl and let the dough rest/rise overnight (12 to 18 hours).

When ready to bake, preheat oven to 450° and place your Dutch oven inside to warm (30 minutes).

By this time the dough should have risen and fallen a bit, leaving it loose, spongy, bubbly and sticky. Turn out onto a well-floured surface. Remember, it's a no-knead bread, so you don't want to over-handle. That said, turning it over a few times in flour is still needed. Take sides of the dough and pull them out and under, to create a domed circle.

Place the dough onto a sheet of parchment and lift up from corners to lower sheet and dough into the hot Dutch oven (be careful not to touch sides, since they're hot!). Replace lid and bake for 30 minutes covered. Then remove the lid to brown the crust for an additional 10 to 12 minutes, or until you reached your desired crust.

Makes one round loaf.

Whole Wheat Banana Bread

While yeast and sourdough continue to intrigue us, there's comfort in going back to basics. Try this quick and delicious loaf next time you're running high on overripe bananas.

- 2 C. whole wheat flour (can use Green Lion's Redeemer whole wheat flour from Heritage Acres farm in Kinzer, PA)
- 1 tsp. baking powder
- ½ tsp. baking soda
- ¼ tsp. cinnamon
- ½ tsp. salt
- 4 medium-sized bananas
- ⅓ C. maple syrup
- ½ C. coconut oil (warm enough to be soft or liquid)
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- ¼ C. honey
- 2 large eggs
- ⅓ C. chopped walnuts (optional)

Preheat oven to 350° and oil your loaf pan.

Begin by whisking together all dry ingredients (flour, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon and salt) in a large bowl. Set aside.

In a blender, puree bananas with all other liquid ingredients (maple syrup, coconut oil, vanilla, honey and eggs). Stop when

smooth. *Note:* If you're like me and keep overripe bananas in the freezer for smoothies, thaw them completely before blending. Otherwise, they will harden the coconut oil.

Pour blended banana mixture into flour bowl and mix to incorporate thoroughly, scraping down sides and bottom of the bowl to grab any lingering pockets of flour. Stir in walnuts, if desired. Batter should be thick and sticky.

Pour batter into greased pan and place in the oven to bake for 50 minutes. Cover with foil and return to oven for 12 more minutes.

Let stand for 10 minutes before slicing in.

Best enjoyed warm with a side of fresh coffee. It will last in aluminum foil or plastic wrap on your counter for several days, or freeze it to enjoy later.

Makes one 9" x 5" loaf. ♦

Alyssa Thayer found her love of food at an early age, frolicking around her mother's organic farm and eating her weight in berries and snap peas each summer. She is a self-proclaimed urban farm girl, whose mission is to bring inspired ideas to life, passionate people together, and good food to every table.



For more great recipes visit CountyLinesMagazine.com

