

Sourdough and Other Culinary Adventures: Sharon's Cookbook



(funky drawings by me)

This is not intended to be a collection of recipes. It is more a description of how I approach the process of preparing food. When I first learned to cook, I followed other people's recipes. But, as I became more comfortable with the process, I became more confident with making substitutions. Understanding the relationship that various foods had to each other led to exploring the possibilities and endless experimentation.

Balance is important: light compliments light and heavy complements heavy. Combining heavy and light means that heavy will always outshine light. Another aspect is that one ingredient may compliment another, but extending that relationship may or may not work. Fried eggs taste well with bacon, and bacon goes with maple syrup, but do fried eggs work with maple syrup?

Mistakes happen, but experimentation helps us learn how to correct them and rescue the food. Is it too salty? Add potatoes, if they compliment the dish they will absorb the excess salt. Too strong of an herbal flavor can be mellowed with a little soy sauce.

Taste! Taste! Taste! Corrections can be made as you go.

It is my feeling that the more one is able to take whatever available ingredients exist and bring them together, then one can create a tasty and nutritious meal in any circumstance from camping out to presenting a formal dinner.

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My love of sourdough dates back to my childhood, when often my mother made sourdough pancakes for dinner, topped, of course, with sour cream, as she was Slavic and my father was Scandinavian. Over the years, I've learned to make various sourdough breads and pastries. My mother's sourdough starter was based on the water that a potato had been boiled in, with yeast and flour added. Other sourdoughs can be made using unwashed fruits that have a natural yeast bloom on them, such as grapes, plums and berries.

I had experimented with other sourdough starters, but finally settled on a wild yeast sourdough starter, utilizing the natural attraction of the yeast in the air to the flour of the wheat. The local yeast will vary from one locale to another depending on the ecological environment, so no two starters will be the same. A friend who lived close to a large brewery said that the beer yeast in the air took over any other yeast in his sourdough starter.

Yeast!! What a wonderful herd of tiny beasts that through the magic of digestion turn flour and water, which otherwise would be glue, into a moist and tender bread. Note that even flat breads will raise some due to the naturally occurring yeast on the grain and in the air.

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Over the last several decades our diets have become very sterile. In the 1950's our parents became afraid of any kind of germ that could remotely contaminate our food, this began the era of prepackaged food mixes. Since then more food has become over processed and many natural and healthful ingredients have been substituted with those that are cheaper to produce and easier to obtain. Food fads are the product of the mass marketing of these cheaper processed foods. The classic "food pyramid" dictating the contents of our daily diet was actually created by an agricultural association basing it on what they could easily grow, not on what was really healthy for us to eat. Reading the ingredients of some of these packaged foods makes me wonder if there is anything in them that is actually edible.

Sourdough, along with other fermented foods, aids our digestion by breaking down ingredients that are either difficult to digest or sometimes slightly toxic to our systems and this all happens long before it enters our digestive tracts. This very good book on all kinds of fermented foods, "Wild Fermentation" by Sandor Ellix Katz, has a lot of good recipes and advice on dietary health.

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The recipes that I present here are not intended as absolutes. They are more a representation of how I cook, which is pretty much by experimentation. I call it cooking by Spirit. I ask myself, "does this seem right, or is this the right amount?". Yes? No? Go for it!

I reserve my experiments for our family dinner and do not foist it upon guests without testing several times for consistency. The majority of our parties tend to be pot luck affairs and usually involve a BBQ. I try to make these party foods simple fair without a lot of exotic ingredients. Too many people are allergic to one thing or another and I have been asked by a lot of people about the ingredients in dishes, so I try to go with the basics.

My all time fall back for these is to quarter Cornish game hens, marinate them in garlic wine, rub under the skins with an herb mixture and throw them on the grill. Accompany that with some sort of cooked vegetable salad, bread and drinks. For the garlic wine, I keep a jar of white wine half full of garlic cloves in the fridge, refilling it as I use from it. When the garlic begins to lose its punch, they get tossed in the next soup, and replaced with fresh. I like to use a “Cajun Injector” (a specialized hypodermic syringe and needle for use in marinating meats) to get the flavor deep into the meat. It also helps to tenderize tougher cuts of meat and to keep the meat moist during cooking.

My favorite pot luck bring along when we go to other peoples parties is a savory filled appetizer bread. Simple sourdough bread dough patted out into a rough rectangle, covered with drained oil preserved sun dried tomatoes, chopped garlic, sliced olives, grated Parmesan and dried herbs, rolled up jelly roll fashion into baguettes, baked and sliced. I usually take 3 or 4 of these loaves and they always seem to vanish quickly.

I love reading other people’s recipes and cookbooks, though I don’t often cook from them. I use them for inspiration, learning what flavors go with others, exploring exotic ethnic tastes from lands and peoples that I have never visited, and through them understanding more of their cultures and outlooks on life.

Some time back, I got a copy of “Please to the Table” by Anya von Bremzen, a great collection of Russian recipes. Her book doesn’t have a lot of bread recipes, but it got me thinking about other types of dough. I later acquired more Russian recipes and began experimenting with adapting some Russian bread and pie doughs, working in the concept of sourdough.

I had often read about the fabled Russian black rye bread, but could never find a good recipe for it. Rye bread recipes exist, but they don’t produce a dark crust. The only recipes I have found use instant coffee to produce a dark crust, and somehow, that just doesn’t seem right to me. Even in Russia, black rye bread seemed to be only a legend, lost somewhere in history. Several of my experiments never quite lived up to what I had heard of...keep trying! But, it got me to thinking about what other recipes I could bend to the will of sourdough.

I asked Nadia, our Russian guardian angel, if she had a recipe for rye bread and this is what she sent me.

INGREDIENTS:

250 g rye flour,
250 g wheat flour,
1 tsp salt,
1 tbsp sugar,
1 full teaspoon dried yeast,

350 ml of warm boiled water,
2 tbsp vegetable oil,
Sesame seed, cumin, coriander.....etc....
Sunflower seeds and pumpkin seeds
(the main wheat flour is not less than 50%, and the remaining 50% can be rye.)
tasty!

I experimented a bit and found that using molasses instead of honey gave me the dark crust I had been looking for. The recipes are later in this collection. See Onion Rye Sourdough Baguettes and Sourdough Rye Dinner Rolls.

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Some generic guidelines for working with sourdough, no matter what type of starter you are using, apply. As it is a process of ongoing fermentation, various elements can affect its well-being.

Never use bowls or utensils that are made of reactive metals. Stainless steel is the only metal that is safe. Copper and aluminum are very reactive and will drastically taint the starter. Regular steel and cast iron can be mildly reactive, but they will affect the taste of your dough. When in doubt, use glass or plastic bowls and plastic or wood utensils.

A well greased baking pan protects the dough from possible contamination and the length of time before the bread has baked and sealed itself by forming a crust is actually quite short.

Always try to use filtered or purified water lacking chlorine, chloramine or other chemicals that are often added to tap water. Reverse Osmosis (RO) water filters work great. All of these impurities can kill your starter, and/or taint it so that it is not usable.

Always feed your starter after removing what your are using in your recipe so that it doesn't run out of nutrients and starve. All starters have a shelf life and as they sit, they will begin to deteriorate from lack of nourishment, even when refrigerated. If you are not able to use your starter on a regular basis, it may be frozen in a freezer proof container until you need to use it again. Simply thaw and refresh it by adding some flour and water, stir and let it set to proof.

Time! Sourdough is exactly that, the dough is souring, using up its nutrients, and producing flavor. For an average loaf that has only the slightest sour touch, the basic bread making recipe that involves raising twice at room temperature for a few hours and then baking is fine. For a more sour dough flavor, slow down the fermentation by refrigerating the dough during its raising for hours or overnight. Another trick is to create a sourdough sponge and adding small amounts of flour and water slowly over days of fermentation (see Long Fermentation Bread).

Bread is basically flour and water made into a thick paste and worked so that glutenous strands develop to give it texture, the basic flatbread. Adding some sort of yeast allows the flour to ferment and give off carbon dioxide resulting in a much softer and loftier end product.

When making bread, these are some of the many optional ingredients that will improve the result of your final loaf:

- 1/4 t. Diastatic Barley Malt added per loaf converts the sugars in the flour making it more easily digested by the yeast thereby giving a boost to raising,
- 1 T. Potato Flour, also called Potato Starch, added per loaf makes bread fluffier,
- 1 T. Vital Wheat Gluten added for each cup of whole grain flour gives structural support,

Bean Flour (ground dried beans) adds nutrition and enhances gluten development (I use garbanzo bean flour),

Cracked Grains or Cereals (coarsely ground grains) add a chewy texture,

Oil or Melted Butter adds richness, but as a coating, it also acts as a pan release and aids in browning the crust. If I use butter, I use salted butter in my recipes, because, well, I like it. If you want to use unsalted butter, increase the amount of salt. Salted butter has about 1/4 t. per cube (1/4 pound).

Milk, Cream and Sour Cream add both richness and nutrition,

Eggs add tenderness,

Salt stiffens gluten strands for structure,

And of course, salt and many other ingredients such as herbs, dried vegetable flakes, dried or candied fruits, ground nuts, cocoa powder, etc. are added just for flavor.

In general, when making bread, I try to thoroughly incorporate each ingredient as I go before adding the next one to try to keep the dough smooth and making sure that I don't end up with a "pocket" of texture or flavor in the final bread dough.

It is wise to not put in too many dry additives or they will absorb too much of the liquid that is needed to moisten the flour and create the bread dough. I have called for many dried additives in my recipes, mostly because I have them on hand and they store well. Fresh or wet ingredients may be substituted, but more flour will be needed to compensate the extra moisture.

For oiling dough, I use olive oil, but any seed or vegetable oil, butter, shortening, or even lard can be used. Use whatever you prefer. After mixing dough in my bowl and turning it out to be kneaded, I simply scrape out any dough or flour residue onto the dough and work it in. I add about a tablespoon or so of oil to the bowl and tilt and turn the bowl to coat the bottom half. After the dough is kneaded and ready to raise, I return it to the bowl, turning the dough to evenly and completely coat it with the oil. A lot of recipes say to take a fresh clean bowl for this. But, why? It's the same dough. Plus, who wants to have to wash another bowl?

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As for washing dishes, pots, etc., tell me, who does enjoy this? I am a big fan of one pot meals: soups, stews, potato, pasta or rice casseroles, etc. I have a combination microwave and convection oven that I use a lot. It has three modes: microwave only, convection only, and a combination of microwave and convection which alternates between the two. I usually only use the Combination #3 setting which equates to roasting in a 325° F oven on my oven (others may vary). You can convection roast meat, potatoes and vegetables, add liquid and a cover and switch to microwave to heat the food, then add pasta or rice and simmer until done...all in one pot! It works on a timer or temperature probe so it can shut itself off when done which is convenient if you are called away and can't pay attention. Other pluses are that it needs less fat to coat the pot and foods are less likely to scorch or stick to the pot. I usually only make one pot meals that are just 2 servings (me and Jerry).

I have also found that less is more when cooking meats on the Combination settings. As meat cooks it changes from very tender to tough as the proteins tighten and the juices are released. I have found that cooking meat until it is barely done and setting it aside, then returning it to the pot at the end for a brief reheating works the best. The meat continues to slowly cook while it rests and the reheat finishes the process leaving it cooked but still tender.

The alternative is to cook it much longer until it has reached the "falling off the bone" stage, which works well with bone and skin on poultry pieces. The microwave half of the combination cooking speeds up the cooking process so that the roasting half of the cycle doesn't dry out the meat too much.

I never use the convection mode for baking bread or pastry. I don't like the effect of the fan blowing the hot air over the dough. Raw dough is tender and the fan can dry out the surface of the dough affecting its ability to cook evenly. I prefer a conventional oven for baking bread. But, I do use the convection mode on the Broiler #1 setting which equates to 475° F, especially for broiling hamburgers or fish.

I also cook in a solar oven (I have an "All American Sun Oven" brand), but mostly only for meats and casseroles. It does a very good job, but it is very dependent on the weather and takes a lot of attention. But, other than that, it's cheap, like FREE, to run. You need a sunny day and preferably in the late Spring to early Autumn. It's best to start in the late morning with an empty oven aimed at the sun and wait til it gets up to temperature (around 300° F or so) before adding food. Then check in on it every hour or so to make sure that it is still aimed at the sun, adjusting it as needed to track the sun. I have found that on a bright Summer day, a whole chicken takes around 3 hours to cook to falling off the bone tenderness.

And since it's nowhere near dinner time in the middle of the afternoon, I have found the perfect solution to keeping it warm until it's time to eat. I got a Japanese made thermally insulated cooking system ("Zojirushi Grandgourmet" brand). It consists of a stainless steel pot with a glass lid, which is convenient for checking on your food without having to lift the lid, and an outer vacuum insulated lidded container that the pot fits in. The idea is that you precook whatever food you want in the pot until partially done and then place the hot pot in the thermal jacket and it keeps it hot enough to finish the cooking process. It doesn't really work as well as they claim. But, the cooking pot fits almost perfectly in the solar oven. The pot has insulated handles that are a bit too big, but they come off easily, and then there's no problem fitting it in the oven. As soon as the oven is full of steam and you can smell the cooked food a few feet away, everything's done. Take the pot out of the oven with hot pads or gloves (Jerry uses welding gloves, everything in and on a solar oven is HOT!) and place it in the insulated jacket and the food will stay hot for hours. The longest I've tested it is 6 hours and everything was still steaming hot. By the way, a whole roasting chicken fits perfectly with space left over for vegetables.

According to the solar ovens directions, you are supposed to be able to bake bread and pies in it, but it does require a long hot sunny day. A friend of ours bakes pies in his oven, but he did warn that if the temperature is uneven, the crust will be soggy. I haven't had the courage or the right weather to try it.

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Note that in some of my recipes, I have indicated that the amounts of ingredients that are almost impossible to accurately measure as ~ (approximate). These include such things as honey, molasses, sour cream, etc. as most of what you are trying to measure invariably remains in the spoon or cup.

But, as for measuring any ingredient, there are so many variables that accuracy is not really a factor. Measuring cups and spoons would have to be laboratory grade to be of any value, and they aren't. I have different spoons and scoops that claim to be a particular quantity and they differ from one to another as to how much they actually hold. In general, I approximate quantities and often just go by a handful of this and some of that. Some desserts and pastries do require accurate measurements, but I seldom make them. In this photo, I measured one half cup of sourdough starter in the glass cup and poured it into the one cup red plastic measuring cup. They are nowhere near the same quantity. I usually try to use the same measuring tool throughout the recipe hoping to be somewhat consistent.



I like to use honey instead of sugar in bread making. It's not as sweet tasting and adds a more floral flavor. To substitute sugar for honey, use no more than 1 T., unless a sweeter bread is desired. Molasses also adds a depth of flavor that honey doesn't and is nice in heavier breads. Do avoid using agave syrup. It has an extremely short shelf life and decomposes rapidly. It will cause bread to get moldy very quickly...I once made a loaf of bread using it and by the next day it was covered with long white strands of mold.

An interesting observation, over the years we've found that sourdough bread seems to have a longer shelf life than ordinary bread. We assume that the sourdough yeast acts as a preservative.

I have also noticed, from early on, that when working with sourdough, more salt is required to give bread products a good flavor. I don't know why, perhaps it's part of the fermentation process.

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In the past, I have used electric mixers and bread machines, but have not been happy with the resulting bread and crust textures. The bread maker that I had said to use about 1 1/4 c. of water to 3 c. of flour, depending on the recipe. But since the process is automatic, it is hard to determine if the ratio of wet to dry is correct.

I have had the best results by hand mixing the dough until almost stiff, then turning it out on a slab of marble and kneading in additional flour until the texture and density feels right. The dough should be relatively smooth and not very sticky. When I can hold the ball of dough in my hand and after a few seconds I feel it starting to sink between my fingers, I know it's ready to be put aside to raise.

Flour density varies greatly with its protein content and absorbs differently depending on the humidity of the air. I have found little difference in using bread flour verses all purpose flour, but usually use some of each in a bread as grain from one harvest to another is likely to differ.

In the effort of ease of cleanup, when I take dough out of the raising bowl for shaping it, and it is coated with oil, I work it as needed on a semi-flexible plastic chopping mat that is 12" (30.5 cm) x 15" (38 cm). It could be a bit longer, but it's the best I've found size-wise. It's especially nice when I am making a filled bread and need to pat it out into a rectangle for filling. When I am done, the mat goes into the dishwasher and cleaning up the marble slab is much easier when it's only got flour on it and no oil.

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For many years I have only used an electric oven. I have found that if I set the oven to its lowest temperature setting (my current stove is computer controlled and won't go below 170° F, but it works well for raising at that temperature), and I wait until it finishes preheating and then turn it off, the oven is at a good temperature for raising bread. Being enclosed, it also keeps any draft away from the dough.

I really like the silicon baking pans for breads. They flex well and enable the removing of the finished bread with ease and also need less oil or grease than metal pans to prevent sticking.

Their only drawback is that they do not wear as well. Repeated baking makes them more fragile and after time they will begin to tear.

I have been using mine every week for several years. They are a bit worn but they are still holding together.



One issue, though, that comes from their flexibility is with the loaf pans. The bundt pan, being round, has enough material structure to support the dough as it raises.

But the loaf pans tend to bow out as the

raising dough pushes against them, which makes the final loaf more wide than tall. It also seems to make the bread more crumbly when trying to slice it for toast.



Jerry made a couple of metal strap "U"'s to support the center of the pans and solve this problem. They work very well!

Baking in any oven benefits from having either a baking stone or tiles on a rack lower than where you bake your bread. It enables the oven heat to dissipate away from the heating element or burner, thus creating a more even heat for baking the dough and eliminating hot spots that can overcook while other areas are undercooked.

If a stone isn't available, placing even just a baking sheet under the bread pan will help to even out the temperature.

In a recent experiment in making just a couple of rolls to go with a dinner, we tried cooking them in a compact toaster oven. It worked very well and used far less electricity than using a regular sized oven. I recommend it for baking small quantities of dough.



Though I do recommend measuring the temperature to see how accurate the dial is. Our oven seems to run a bit hotter than the dial says. It may be a result of the size of the oven as the heating element is a lot closer to the food than in a conventional oven.

In the past I have always had trouble with the bread dough falling when I take it out of the oven and set it to one side to preheat the oven for baking. The slightest jostling of the pan seemed to make it fall. Just as an experiment, I tried leaving it in the oven after raising and just turning the oven on to the baking temperature, letting the dough come up to temperature with the oven...it worked! The dough didn't fall and I adjusted the baking time to add just a few minutes more and it came out fine. This was in an electric oven, but I assume it would work the same with a gas oven.

I keep a baking stone permanently on the bottom rack of my oven, so it protects the bread dough against burning from the intense heat from the element during the pre-heat cycles. I also "store" a couple of baking sheets on the rack above the stone and place my bread pans on it during baking...more protection and more even heat.

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I love using crock pots (slow cookers) for soups, stews, slow cooking meats, and making stock. I have two different sized crock pots: a large 3 quart oval crock pot with 3 temperature settings of "keep warm", "low" and "high" that is mostly used for a slow cooked dinner of from 4 to 6 servings, and a small one quart low temperature one that we inherited from Jerry's mom, which is perfect for making stock.

I keep a 1 quart zippered plastic baggie in the freezer for kitchen "scraps": bits of veg trimmings that aren't quite pretty enough to serve but are perfectly edible, and bones, fat, and skin trimmings from poultry and other meats. I try to keep the scraps as small as possible for better rendering, breaking the bones into smaller pieces to extract the goodness from the marrow. Jerry provided a heavy duty cable cutter that works very well to cut larger bones. It doesn't have to be an expensive cutter, just a cheap one. Clean well before use.

When the bag is almost full, I dump the contents into the small crock pot and add about 1/2 cup of generic mild flavored white wine, which works well at pulling the gelatin out of the bones and cartilage. I add any herbs or dried vegetables that are handy and top it off with water to cover the ingredients. I don't add any salt, but reserve that for when I am cooking with the finished stock. I let it cook overnight or for

about 12 hours. Then, I strain the stock off and refrigerate it to let the rendered fat congeal on the surface. I scrape the fat off to a freezer container to use for cooking and keep the stock in a jar in the fridge. I usually end up with about 3 cups of stock which is plenty for a few days to a weeks worth of dinners. It usually is so thick with gelatin that it won't pour and has to be scooped out with a spoon. I normally thin what I want to use with water for cooking rice and pasta and then season it as needed.

Salt in casseroles or soups...I normally use granulated bouillon: chicken, beef, mushroom, or tomato flavored chicken instead of salt. People tell me, "it's just salt!" Well, maybe, but I think not. It's got herbs and other flavorings in it. Anyhow, I like it better, but don't use a lot of it. Life is short, use what you like.

Oh, and the leftover bones, veg and other bits...our pet chickens love to sort through that and munch whatever they can. They particularly love the cartilage on the bones that have rendered all of that gelatin. Whatever is left when they are done sorting and eating, goes into the compost pile. With all that extra cooking and a little aging in the compost, the bones easily crush down to bone meal which is great for the garden plants.

Some other things I try to keep on hand in the freezer are chopped scallions, thinly sliced leeks, peeled garlic, diced bell and Anaheim peppers ready to toss a small handful into the pot of dinner whenever it's needed.

A trick I've noticed with some veg root trimmings is that if it has a good root structure and has not been refrigerated too long, you can plant the root end and it will grow. It is particularly easy with scallions. I make sure to leave at least about a half inch of the onion part above the roots and keep them wet in a dish of water until you are ready to plant them. I have several onion plants that have been growing in my garden for at least ten years. They go to seed in the fall, but they don't die off, they just keep growing back.

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Several years back, we got interested in aquaponic gardening. It's similar to hydroponic gardening, but more efficient and less of an impact on the environment. Hydroponics use chemical fertilizers, many of which are petroleum based.

Once these have been pumped through the plant bed system, they are often discarded. They have used up as much of the fertilizer as the plants need and what is left in the solution is too weak to be reused, but it is also too strong to be safely discarded into the environment, making it a hazardous waste product.

Aquaponics combines plant growing with aquatic life farming, usually fresh water fish, though some people use crayfish. The principle is that the excrement from the fish dissolved in the water is pumped through the plant grow bed and then returned to the

fish tank. The plants, in their turn, clean the water absorbing the manure as it passes over their roots so that the returning water is filtered. Since the manure is fairly dilute in the water and is recycled through the plant root system on a regular basis, there is no issue of over pollution.

A good book resource for this is “Aquaponic Gardening”, by Sylvia Bernstein.

We started our experiment when we had some pet ducks. We had an inflatable plastic kiddie pool that was about 8’ long by 4’ wide by about 18” high for our four ducks. The water got soiled very quickly from their use of it. We put a pump on a timer in the pool and pumped the water to a garden sink that was filled with small rocks. The sink had a pipe that returned the water to the pool as it drained.

We planted tomatoes in the sink and they grew very well. So well, that the plants have lasted through several winters producing fruit even in January without any heat or protective cover from the elements.

Grow beds will need to be cleaned out occasionally as decaying vegetation will eventually clog the pipes. The frequency of cleaning will depend on the environment. In a greenhouse where there is no introduction of outside leaves and dirt, and the dead vegetation is regularly removed as the plant’s life cycle is completed, the system should remain clean for a long time. We have actually never cleaned our experimental system and it has been exposed to the elements for several years.

The timer is an essential part of the system as the plants cannot take being permanently submerged in water. The roots require air to balance their nutrition cycles. Some plants can stand longer submersion then others and experimentation will determine the flood and drain time cycle. We had good success with 5 minutes of flood and 45 minutes of drain, continuous.

Our new house will have a greenhouse and we plan to put in an aquaponic system using crayfish, a tasty byproduct to the vegetables.

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Years back, after getting successive years of abundant fruit harvest from our modest backyard “orchard”, we progressed from canning fruit to dehydrating for storage. In general it takes a lot less effort and stores more compactly in smaller containers.

After trying different types of cheap dehydrators, we gave up on them. Most of them had the heating element on the bottom and provided little air flow other than straight up. They had stacked food trays that you were supposed to rotate from bottom to top. It took a lot of attention and never worked very well. The fruit on the bottom would start to burn while the fruit on the top would start to get moldy.

We stepped up to a more expensive type that had horizontal air flow and was much better, but the food trays still had poor air flow as the vents in them were too small. It also suffered with the problem of having to rotate the trays for even drying. The bottom was too dry while the top was too wet.

We eventually found a “Sportsman’s Guide” horizontal flow one that works very well. It’s both fast and efficient. The food trays are metal and much more airy. We had to make a little modification to them, adding a plastic mesh as the openings were too big for smaller slices of fruit and mushrooms. But it works very well.

We’ve dried lots of fruit, veg and mushrooms for further use, and it only takes a few hours to reconstitute the dried fruit for making filled breads or pies. Dried veg just goes by handfuls into soups, stews, or stocks. Mushrooms can go into soup as is or be reconstituted for pasta or rice dishes. I am amazed how well some dried vegetables reconstitute in soups, particularly beets. They are almost as good as fresh and make preparing borscht quick and easy.

When we first started thinking about learning to speak Russian, we chanced upon a Russian deli that was near us. For some reason we had never noticed the shop before...well, when it’s right...



It was a great place to explore new and tasty foods and practice reading labels. The shop keepers were nice and friendly and humorously helped our attempts at Cyrillic. They were amazed that we wanted to move to Russia, but over time, I think we won them over. They are impressed with pictures we’ve shared of our new house being built. They are great people and we will miss them!

So...on to it...do something adventurous...go out and experiment!

My Mother's Sourdough Potato Starter

Peel 1 medium potato and boil it in enough water to cover. Drain off the water and reserve it. Mash the potato. Add water to the reserved water to make 2 c. lukewarm liquid. In it dissolve 1 T. yeast. Stir in mashed potato and 1 T. sugar. Let stand in a loosely covered glass jar for 2 days or more. Then refrigerate until needed.

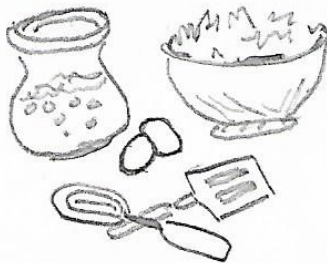
The night before the starter is first needed, remove from the refrigerator and add 2 c. flour and beat until smooth. Cover loosely and let stand in a warm place overnight. Use the amount needed and refrigerate the rest.

Each time before the starter is needed, add 1 c. flour and 1 c. water and let stand overnight in a warm place.

My Mother's Sourdough Pancakes

Beat 2 egg yolks with 1/2 t. salt and stir in 2 c. sourdough starter. Beat 2 egg whites with 2 T. sugar until stiff and fold into starter mixture. Dissolve 1 t. baking soda in 2 t. water and add to mixture. Bake on a hot buttered griddle, turning as bubbles appear.

She often added leftover cooked rice to the batter and these were very good!



Wild Yeast Sourdough Starter

Combine:

1/2 cup water

Optional: 1 t. milk (San Francisco sourdough is based on the lactobacillus bacteria which lends its unique flavor)

Optional: 1/4 t. ground cumin (for some reason, cumin speeds the attraction of wild yeast)

1/2 cup whole wheat flour

Stir together and let sit in a glass jar, uncovered, at room temperature for 2-3 days or until fermentation is obvious (bubbly). I top the jar with a screen to keep out bugs as fruit flies and gnats are attracted to fermentation.

Add 1/2 cup water and 1/2 cup all purpose or whole wheat flour and allow to ferment for 1-2 more days, or more, uncovered. The longer the fermentation, the more the sour flavor is developed.

Feed Wild Yeast Starter after each removal with equal parts of water and whole wheat flour (1/4 to 1/2 cup each to achieve desired quantity), cover loosely and store in refrigerator or package in freezer safe container and freeze until needed. Since flour density and absorptive qualities vary, more flour or water can be added. The starter should not be too thick. I prefer it to be more liquid.

Shelf life, refrigerated, and not refreshed is about 3 to 4 weeks.



As it sits, it will separate. Stir the liquid and solids together before using. If it foams, the yeast is still active.

The longer it sits, the liquid will start to darken; it is further fermenting, running low on food for the yeast, and becoming more sour.

If the liquid on top smells too sour, gently spoon off some of it and replace it with the same amount of water, and then stir it together. As long as it foams up, it should be fine to use.



Basic Sourdough Bread with Lots of Variations

Bread (makes 1 medium loaf):

Stir together in a bowl:

1/2 cup sourdough starter

1 cup water or liquid of choice (milk, fruit juice, reserved juice from canned or reconstituted dried fruits, etc.)

~1 t. to 1/4 cup honey and/or other syrups (molasses, barley, rice, maple, etc.)

1 t. baker's yeast

1 cup all purpose flour (or a combination of all purpose flour, bread flour, any specialty flour, such as whole wheat, spelt, teff, barley, rye, etc.)

Optional Additions:

1/4 t. diastatic barley malt

1 T. potato flour or potato starch

1 T. bean flour

1 T. vital wheat gluten for each cup of whole grain flour

Add from 1 t. to 2 T. of any of the following: seeds (sesame, poppy, flax, shelled sunflower, shelled pumpkin, etc.) or ground nuts, cracked grains, oatmeal, grated dried coconut, chocolate chips, dried buttermilk powder, egg, sliced olives, dried tomatoes, herbs, vanilla, other extracts, or other flavorings, etc.

For a very moist bread, add up to 1/2 c. pureed pumpkin, or try grated zucchini, onion, carrots, other moist vegetables, or a combination of them.

Cover mixture and let ferment at room temperature for ~1 hour to proof yeast.

Stir in 1/2 T. salt and work in about 3 cups bread flour or all purpose flour or a blend of both, about a fourth to a half of a cup at a time, knead until a smooth elastic dough is formed. (I prefer to do this on a pastry slab by hand instead of using a machine mixer. It gives me much more control over the texture of the dough.) Roll dough in an oiled bowl to coat, cover and raise away from draft for about 2 hours or until doubled in bulk.

Raising option:

Raise overnight at room temperature or in a refrigerator for a more sour flavor and allow dough to come to room temperature before shaping or filling.

Options for Shaping:

- 1)** Punch down dough and shape into greased baking pan or onto greased baking sheet. Or, divide into individual rolls, biscuits, bread sticks, etc., adding herbs, garlic, grated hard cheese, or other flavorings as desired.
- 2)** Pat out flat into a rectangle or divide into individual smaller rectangular flats, and fill with desired filling.

Options for Filling:

Sweet:

Fruits (Note: If using canned fruit, drain off liquid and use as part of the initial 1 cup of liquid in the bread dough mixture. If using dried fruits, reconstitute as desired in water or other liquid, drain off excess and reserve to use as above.), ground nuts, nut butters, tahini, pureed pumpkin, cinnamon and/or other spices, brown sugar, etc.

Savory:

Drained oil preserved sun dried tomatoes, garlic, sliced olives, grated Parmesan or other cubed cheeses, cubed ham, herbs, etc. (These shaped as jelly rolled baguettes, baked and sliced make great appetizers.)

Shaping for Filled Dough:

- 1)** Roll up jelly roll style or pinch into buns, turnovers, or other shapes for individual servings.
- 2)** Leave as a long loaf or other shape or roll into a circle, joining ends and bake in greased bundt pan or on greased baking sheet.

Raising & Baking:

Raise away from draft about 2-3 hours or until desired height is achieved.

Option:

Set oven to lowest temperature and turn off when temperature is achieved and place dough in oven to raise.

Option:

Many recipes say to place a small oven proof cup of water to one side in oven and preheat oven. Do not remove the water during baking as it adds a small amount of steam to give a last raise boost to bread during initial cooking.

Or to mist the inside of the hot oven with water.

I have tried these methods, but it doesn't seem to make any difference.

What works the best for me is to disturb the raised bread as little as possible. I have even found that after raising the bread in the warmed oven, I just leave it in there while the oven is coming up to the baking temperature...seems to work just fine, with just adding a few minutes to the baking time to compensate the change in temperature.

Bake at 350° F for about 45 minutes.

For a more even crust on a regular loaf of bread, turn out of pan onto a baking sheet for the last 10 to 15 minutes of cooking.

Increase time and/or temperature for a darker crust.

Remove and let rest at least 20 to 30 minutes before serving. This will give any filling a chance to set up before cutting.



Long Fermentation Wild Yeast Sourdough Bread

(makes 1 medium loaf)

Stir together in glass or plastic bowl 1/2 cup starter, 1/4 cup water, and 1/2 cup of all purpose or bread flour, loosely cover and let ferment at room temperature for 24 hours.

Stir in 1/4 cup water, and 1/2 cup of all purpose flour, cover and let ferment at room temperature for 12 hours.

Again stir in 1/4 cup water, and 1/2 cup of all purpose flour, cover and let ferment at room temperature for another 12 hours.

Once again, stir in 1/4 cup water, and 1/2 cup all purpose flour, cover and let ferment at room temperature for now just 3 hours.

Options:

Add 1/4 t. diastatic barley malt flour (aids yeast in converting sugars and makes a firmer dough).

Add 1 T potato flour or potato starch (makes bread fluffier).

Stir in 1/2 T. salt and add about 2 1/2 cups all purpose or bread flour, kneading in about a forth to a half a cup at a time until a smooth elastic dough is formed.

Roll dough in an oiled bowl to coat, cover and raise away from draft for about 3 hours. (Longer fermentation will develop a more sour flavor.)

Punch down and shape in oiled pan or on an oiled baking sheet. Raise away from draft about 2-3 hours or until desired loft is achieved.

Bake at 350° F for 35 minutes. Turn out of pan, if used, onto baking sheet and bake an additional 10 minutes. For a darker crust, increase oven heat and baking time.

Remove and let rest 20-30 minutes before serving.

Rustic Sourdough Pie Crust

(makes 1 pie crust)

Mix together:

1/8 c. chopped nuts or oatmeal

1 1/4 c. all purpose flour

1/4 c. whole wheat flour or a nut flour, such as chestnut or almond

3/4 t. salt

1/4 t. baking soda

Cut in 1/2 c. butter (1 stick, if using unsalted butter, increase salt from 3/4 t. to 1 t.) until mixture is crumbly

Pour 1/2 c. sourdough starter into flour mixture, stirring until mixture is thoroughly moistened, but do not overwork dough as that will cause gluten strands to develop and prevent a flaky crust. Refrigerate dough for at least 20 minutes.

Roll out dough on a floured surface to a rough circle about 1/8" thick.

Place in a pie dish or on a baking sheet. Top with filling of choice allowing a surrounding edge of 1" to 2" of bare crust. Fold the crust edges over the filling or fold edges to a decorative crimp.

Bake at 400° F for 10 minutes. Reduce heat to 350° F and bake for 45 minutes to an hour, or until crust is golden brown and fruit filling is bubbly or a custard filling is set.

Possible Fillings:

May include fresh, canned, or reconstituted dried fruits, or a combination of the above. Sugar and spices of choice. 1 to 2 T. of tapioca flour as needed to thicken excess juices.

Always use use a pie dish to contain more liquid fillings, such as pumpkin or other custard or cheesecake fillings.

Mouse Pie

When I was a child, my mother found this recipe in a magazine:

Among the recipes of Mrs. Wilfrid H. Huntington of West Tisbury, Massachusetts, lurks the original one for mouse pie, given her some years ago by her mother, Mrs. Charles G. Norton and published in the *Vineyard Gazette*:

“Boil about a cup of macaroni until tender (10 minutes). While this is cooking, fry a few field mice long enough to fry out some of the excess fat. Grease a casserole with some of this fat and put a layer of half the macaroni in it. Add a layer of thinly sliced onions, and a medium can of tomatoes, juice and all. Salt and pepper well.

“Add a layer of field mice and cover with the remaining macaroni. Sprinkle with cracker crumbs seasoned with salt and pepper and dabs of butter (or drippings). Bake about 30 minutes, until the field mice are done. (. . . If you find it difficult to obtain mice you can use sausage—in fact I always do.)”

I served mouse pie to the family this summer and they liked it. I used sausage.

She made it often for our dinners...yes, she used sausage. I have also made it often since...using sausage.

Potato Sausage

Another sausage adventure was with our local grocery store butcher. He made a very good potato sausage that we often bought.

After a few years of complimenting him on his recipe, he consented to sharing it with my mother.

The photo is a bit hard to read:

Makes 100 lbs sausage

30 lbs potatoes

30 lbs boneless pork

15 lbs beef

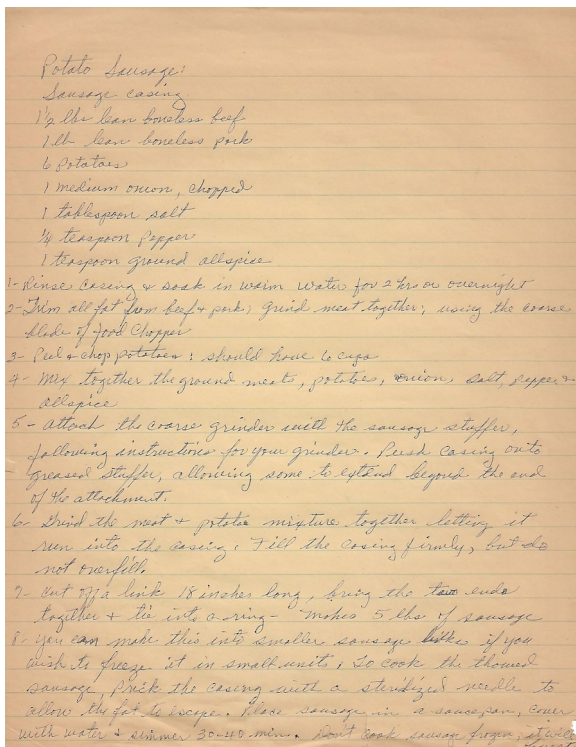
10 cans milk

27 oz. salt

1 oz. ginger

1 oz. allspice

6 oz. coarse ground pepper



Makes 100 lbs sausage

Date _____ 19__

M _____

Address _____

Reg. No.	Clerk	Account Forward		
1	30 - Potato			
2	30 - pork Boneless			
3	15 - Beef			
4	10 cans Milk			
5	27 oz salt			
6	1 oz ginger			
7	1 oz Allspice			
8	6 oz coarse pepper			
9				
10				
11				
12				
13				
14				
15				

35

Your Account Stated to Date — If Error Is Found Return at Once

Since 100 pounds of sausage is a bit much for the average family home freezer, my mother reduced the recipe to a more manageable amount.

She made some modifications and also eliminated the milk as she thought it would make the mixture too wet.

Her recipe:

Mom's Potato Sausage

Sausage casing

1 1/2 lbs lean boneless beef

1 lb lean boneless pork

6 potatoes

1 medium onion, chopped

1 tablespoon salt

1/4 teaspoon pepper

1 teaspoon ground allspice

1 – Rinse casing & soak in warm water for 2 hours or overnight.

2 – Trim all fat from beef & pork, grind meat together, using the coarse blade of a food chopper.

3 – Peel & chop potatoes, should have 6 cups.

4 – Mix together the ground meats, potatoes, onion, salt, pepper & allspice.

5 – Attach the coarse grinder with the sausage stuffer, following instructions for your grinder. Push casing onto greased stuffer, allowing some to extend beyond the end of the attachment.

6 – Grind the meat & potato mixture together letting it run into the casing. Fill the casing firmly, but do not overfill.

7 – Cut off a link 18 inches long, bring the two ends together & tie into a ring. Makes 5 lbs of sausage.

8 – You can make this into smaller sausage links if you wish to freeze it into smaller units. To cook the thawed sausage, prick the casing with a sterilized needle to allow the fat to escape. Place sausage in a saucepan. Cover with water & simmer 30-40 minutes. Don't cook sausage from frozen, it will burst.



Olive Brine

Olives are picked in the fall. Best to gather the fallen ones, discarding any that are infected with insects. A small hole in the flesh usually indicates they have olive fly larva in them. Olives may be pitted before soaking, but leaving the pits in gives more flavor to the final product.

Make a brine solution of 1/2 t. salt per 1 c. of water, and heat to dissolve the salt. Don't wash the olives. If necessary, a brief rinse can be used to remove dirt, but rubbing it off would be better. Make a cut length wise on 2 sides of each olive and immediately submerge in the brine solution. Keep olives covered with the solution. A non-corrosive weight may be placed on top to keep the olives submerged. Cover the container loosely and keep in a cool dark place.

The next day, make a new brine solution of 1 t. salt per 1 cup of water, and heat to dissolve the salt. Drain the olives and replace with fresh brine. Cover and store as before.

The next day, make a new brine solution of 2 t. salt per 1 cup of water, and heat to dissolve the salt. Drain the olives and replace with fresh brine. Cover and store as before.

The next day, taste a small piece to test for bitterness. Repeat previous day's heavier brine wash process until taste is satisfactory.

At this point, olives may be drained and packed in a final brine solution and either stored under refrigeration or canned (180° F for 30 minutes) for shelf storage.

The final brine solution may consist of a ratio of 2-3 t. salt, 2 t. sugar (optional), 2 T. vinegar of choice, per 1 c. of water. Heat to dissolve the salt and sugar. Additional spices may be added, such as: bay, coriander, lemon, pepper, chiles, oregano, sage, garlic, etc.



Bread and Butter Pickles

I've always loved Bread and Butter Pickles. The addition of curry powder to the recipe my mom always used made them extra good.

One night we had a couple of friends over for dinner and served these as an appetizer. The four of us finished off an entire quart of these pickles during dinner.

Make a brine solution at 1 T. salt to 2 c. water, enough to cover cucumbers. Slice cucumbers in rounds about 1/4" thick. Optional: add thinly sliced onions. Cover with brine and soak for 1 hour. Drain.

Pickling solution (approximate per 1 quart canning jar):

- 2 c. vinegar
- 1 c. sugar
- 1/2 t. black peppercorns
- 1/2 t. celery seeds
- 1 t. onion powder
- 1/2 t. turmeric
- 1/2 t. dry mustard
- 1/2 t. mustard seeds
- 1 t. curry powder (standard Madras blend, a spicier blend could be used if you want more heat)

Boil together. Pack cucumber and onion slices into canning jars and fill with pickling solution. Lid and can for 25 minutes.



Salt Cured Dill Pickles

A lot of store bought pickles have too much of a vinegar flavor which drowns out the other flavors. When I discovered salt cured pickles, I realized how much better tasting they were and also much healthier for you.

Equipment:

- 1 quart wide-mouth mason jars
- old style Saint Benoit Yogurt ceramic cups or glasses or other small jars that fit loosely inside the mason jar lip to use as pressure cups to hold the pickles below the brine
- plastic wrap to cover cup or glass
- a small tray or saucers to set mason jars on to collect any overflowing juices

Ingredients:

- Persian cucumbers (about 6" long), or other types as desired: 4 to 6 per jar depending on size and thickness of slices
- dill seeds or dill weed: 1 tsp. per jar, or 1" thick pieces of dill stalk, as desired
- green or black peppercorns: 1/2 to 1 tsp. per jar
- peeled garlic cloves, sliced in half: 4 to 6 per jar
- optional: for more crunch and/or traditional Russian flavors, add any or more of the following: fresh grape leaves, fresh oak leaves, fresh black current leaves, horseradish roots and leaves, or caraway seeds

Brine:

Make a brine to the ratio of 1 c. water mixed with 1 T. Kosher salt (use about 1 1/2 cups per quart jar)

Sterilize quart mason jars. Trim the ends of the cucumbers and slice into 1/4" to 1/2" thick chunks. Slice garlic cloves in half length-wise.

Fill mason jars to about 3/4ths full with cucumbers, garlic, spices and any other desired options. Top with enough brine to cover mixture well.

Wrap the outside of the pressure cup or glass with enough plastic wrap to cover with some spare wrap. Insert the plastic wrapped cup or glass and press down to bring brine level up to top of the mason jar. If the cup fits too loosely, fold down extra plastic wrap around top of jar to prevent contamination. If additional weight is required to keep the pickle mixture well covered with brine, fill the cup or glass with water or small weights.



Place the mason jars on a tray or saucers to catch any overflowing juices. Let stand at room temperature (65° F to 72° F) for 5 or more days until fermentation ceases and bubbles no longer appear.



Cooler temperature will take a longer time to ferment.

As fermentation progresses and gas bubbles appear, jostle jars and weights to release them. If too much brine bubbles out, add more to keep pickles submerged.

Remove weights and transfer the pickles to clean jars. Cover jar tightly with a plastic lid and store in refrigerator for up to a month.

For longer storage, remove pickle mixture to clean sterilized mason jars, filling to standard canning level and can according to standard canning methods.

Sauerkraut

My sauerkraut follows the typical German spice blend.

About 7 quarts of veg will fill 4 quart canning jars.

Coarsely chop or shred about 2-3 lbs of green cabbage, about 1 lb of red cabbage, and a couple of carrots and place in a large glass or plastic bowl. A short cut is to buy bags of the standard pre-shredded coleslaw vegetable mix from the grocery store.

Add about a tablespoon each of crushed juniper berries, yellow mustard seeds, caraway seeds, black pepper corns, and Kosher salt.

Stir the mixture with non-metallic utensils or clean hands to release juices and let rest for 10 minutes; repeat stirring and resting over 1 to 2 hours.

Sterilize quart mason jars and fill with the cabbage mixture and any liquid to about 3/4ths full, packing tightly.

Make a brine at a ratio of 1/2 T salt dissolved in 1 c. water.

Top each jar with enough brine to cover the mixture well.

Take either old style Saint Benoit Yogurt ceramic cups, jars, or glasses that fit loosely inside the mason jar lip. See photos of Salt Cured Dill Pickles.

Wrap the outside of the ceramic cup or glass with enough plastic wrap to cover with some spare wrap. Insert the plastic wrapped cup or glass and press down to bring brine level up to top of mason jar, fold wrap down over top of mason jar.

If additional weight is required to keep cabbage mixture well covered with brine, fill the cup or glass with water or small weights. Place the mason jars on tray or saucers to catch any overflowing juices.

Let stand at room temperature (65° F to 72° F) for 2-3 weeks. Cooler temperature will take a longer time to ferment.

After bubbling stops, remove cup insert and add more brine, if necessary. Skim off any (harmless) white spots or film from top of liquid.

Cover the jars tightly with plastic lids or plastic wrapped metal lids and store in refrigerator until used up.

If you wish to freeze it, which works well, drain off excess liquid and store in individual use quantities in zippered plastic bags or other freezer safe containers. Reserve the sauerkraut juice, either refrigerated or frozen, for use in cooking to add a little sauerkraut flavor to soups or casseroles. To freeze small quantities, use an ice cube tray and when frozen solid, transfer them to a baggie or other freezer container.

In the photo, this sauerkraut has been thawed from frozen and it still kept its crunchiness.



Sausages with Potatoes and Sauerkraut

(2 servings)

Melt 1 T. chicken fat, add 2 coarsely chopped slices of bacon and 1/4 sliced medium onion. Saute until onions are translucent and the bacon has rendered its fat.

Add 14 oz. (~500 g) boiling potatoes, cut into 1/2" dice. Stirring often, cook until potatoes are almost tender, about 20-30 minutes.

Add 8 oz. (~200 g) mild sausages cut into 1/2" chunks and cook until done, about 10 minutes.

Add 8 oz. (~200 g) home-made sauerkraut, flavored with mustard seed, caraway seed, and juniper berries. Top with a broth made of 1/2 c. hot water, 2-3 t. brown mustard, 1 t. bouillon (or salt to taste), 1/2 t. granulated garlic or pressed fresh garlic, 1/2 t. thyme, several grinds of black pepper, and a dash of turmeric. Stir and simmer 5 to 15 minutes until sauce is reduced to a thin gravy.

One Pot Sauerkraut Beef Noodle Casserole

(this is done in a combination oven using microwave and convection modes, substitute stove top and oven preparation where appropriate – makes 2 servings)

In a microwave safe casserole dish, add about a tablespoon of rendered fat and microwave briefly (30 seconds to a minute on high) to melt the fat.

Add about a half pound of flank steak that has been cut into 3/4" to 1" dice. Top with a few grinds of black pepper and about a 1/4 t. of caraway seeds, and stir to coat with the fat. Cook on Combination Setting #3 (325° F) for 3 minutes, then stir and repeat until the meat is just barely cooked, about 9 minutes total. Remove the beef to a separate dish and let it rest, leaving any drippings in the casserole dish.

Stir in ~1/4 c. bacon cut into 1/4" dice to the casserole and saute on Combination #3 until it has rendered its fat. I normally give it a minute or so at a time, stirring and restarting until done.

Add 1/4 c. thinly sliced leeks and saute on Combination #3 until translucent and then add about 1 c. of thinly sliced green cabbage and continue cooking until the cabbage is translucent.

Drain any liquid from 3/4 c. of fresh or thawed frozen sauerkraut and add it to 1/2 c. of jellied stock. Add enough water to make 1 1/2 cups total. Season with 1 t. beef bouillon (or salt) and pepper and heat about a minute or two to melt the stock and dissolve the seasoning.

Add the stock mixture to the casserole, cover and heat for about 5 minutes on a medium high microwave setting (I use #8 out of #10 on my oven) until the mixture is hot. Stir in about 6-8 oz. uncooked whole wheat noodles and cook until the pasta is al dente. I use the microwave setting #8 for 5 minutes at a time, stirring and then restarting. Additional water may be needed, adding in about 1/4 c. at a time.

When the noodles are tender, add the drained sauerkraut and return the beef to the dish. Heat 5 minutes on #8, and serve.

Пицца: Sourdough Pizza Dough

(makes 1 10"x15" pizza)

Mix together:

1/2 c. sourdough starter
1/2 c. filtered water
1 t. yeast
1 t. salt

Stir in (optional)

2 to 4 crushed garlic cloves
a handful or so of crushed dried herbs such as basil, oregano, thyme, etc.

Work in

2 c. all purpose flour (or a blend of 1/4 c. specialty flour of choice and 1 3/4 c. all purpose flour) 1/4 cup at a time, until thoroughly blended.

Place in an oiled bowl, turning the dough to evenly coat it with oil. Cover and allow to raise until doubled in bulk.

Punch down and allow it to raise a second time.

Turn out the dough on a lightly oiled baking sheet or pizza pan. Pat out the dough to desired shape. Pinch the edges of the dough to create a ridge.

Cover lightly with plastic wrap and allow to rest for about 30 minutes.



Bake at 350° F for 10 minutes to set crust.

Remove and add pizza toppings.

Bake an additional 20 to 30 minutes or until crust is golden brown and cheese is bubbly.

Slice and serve.

Toppings in photo:

sliced leeks

chopped cooked spicy Sicilian chicken sausage

halved grape tomatoes

mozzarella cheese cut into bits



Sourdough Corn Bread

(makes 1 medium loaf)

Stir together in glass or plastic bowl:

1/2 cup sourdough starter

~1/4 c. honey

1/4 c. melted butter

1/2 c. milk

~1/4 c. sour cream

2 beaten eggs

1 t. yeast

1 T. potato flour or potato starch

1/4 c. grated Parmesan cheese

1/2 c. canned corn niblets, drained, reserving remainder of can and liquid for chili

1 1/2 c. cornmeal

Cover and allow to proof for about an hour at room temperature.

Stir in 1/2 T. salt and work in about 2 1/2 c. all purpose flour, about a half of a cup at a time, and knead until a smooth elastic dough is formed.

Roll dough in an oiled bowl to coat, cover and raise away from draft until doubled in bulk.

Punch down dough and shape into greased baking pan or onto greased baking sheet.

Raise away from draft about 2-3 hours or until desired height is achieved.

Option: set oven to lowest temperature and turn off when temperature is achieved and place dough in oven to raise.

Bake at 350° F for 45 minutes.



For a more even crust on a regular loaf of bread, turn out of pan onto a baking sheet for the last 10 to 15 minutes of cooking.

Remove and let rest at least 20 to 30 minutes before serving.

Suggestion: serve slathered with butter as an accompaniment to chili.

Mild Mellow Chili

(makes 3 to 4 servings)

Soak 1 c. dried pinto beans overnight in water to cover. If the beans are old and tend to be tough, use filtered water and add 1/4 t. baking soda, put on a warm hot plate for best results.

Rinse and drain beans and add to crock pot. And add 1/2 to 3/4 lb. stewing beef cut into bite sized pieces, one 28 oz. can of crushed tomatoes with their liquid, the remainder of the 15 oz. can of corn niblets, from the sourdough corn bread recipe, along with their liquid (don't forget to rinse any goodies out of the cans and into the pot), and any fresh or dried chiles of your choice.

Bring to heat and let simmer for several hours or until almost done when meat and beans are tender.

Correct the seasoning with salt and add a few healthy spoonfuls of mild chile powder to taste.

Simmer a half hour or so to smooth and thicken the sauce.



Sourdough Rye Dinner Rolls

(makes 2 rolls)

Mix together:

1/4 c. sourdough starter
1/4 c. filtered water
2 T. molasses
1 t. yeast
1 t. salt
1 T. cracked rye grain
1/4 c. rye flour
1 T. vegetable oil or melted butter

Work in

About 3/4 c. all purpose flour a little at a time, until a smooth dough.

Place in an oiled bowl, turning the dough to evenly coat it with oil. Cover and allow to raise until doubled in bulk.

Punch down and divide dough in half.
Form each half into a smooth ball and place on a lightly oiled baking sheet. I use English Muffin bands to contain the dough in a round shape.

Cover lightly with plastic wrap and allow to raise to desired height.

Bake in a preheated toaster oven at 275° F for 20 minutes.

Remove bands and let cool slightly.

Note: English Muffin bands also work great for shaping hamburgers and making hamburger buns.



Блины: Blini (Russian style pancakes)

The first time we ever had blini was on our second trip to Russia at Nadia's house. Some were served with red caviar and others were stuffed with meat, they were excellent. I later asked her for her recipe and she sent it to me. This is her recipe.

* * * * *

Here is the recipe of my lace pancakes with holes.

Sift white flour. Heat one liter of milk to 40 degrees, add 3 eggs, 1/2 tea spoon of salt, 3 big soup spoons of sugar or slightly less if pancakes will go with unsweetened filling/stuffing like caviar or minced meat with onions stewed before we fry pancakes. Whisk the dough with a blender to lush foam, and then put 1/3 teaspoon of baking soda and 3 cups of flour, continuing to whip.

At the end add 4 soup spoons of vegetable oil and leave the dough for an hour. It should rest and enrich with oxygen, and get even more bubbles. Fry pancakes with both sides on hot, slightly oiled pan, turning as soon as will appear the holes. I like when they are slightly beige.

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Good appetite!

* * * * *

I divided her recipe in half to make a smaller amount for just the two of us and it worked great. I had seen a few other recipes for blini made with yeast and considered using sourdough. Here's my recipe.

(makes about 4-6 servings...recipe may be doubled, if serving a crowd)

Blend together:

2 eggs
1 3/4 c. warm milk
1/4 c. sourdough starter
1/4 t. salt
1 T. sugar for savory blini, or 2 T. for sweet blini

Add in:

1/6 t. baking soda
1/4 c. buckwheat flour
1 c. plus 1 T. all purpose flour (if batter seems too thin, add more flour as desired)
2 T. olive oil, other vegetable oil, or melted butter

And blend until smooth.

Let batter stand at room temperature for at least 1 hour.

When ready to cook, heat a seasoned cast iron griddle pan over medium heat.

Melt and spread about 1 t. butter onto the pan to evenly coat. Additional butter may be added during cooking if needed.

If batter separates, briefly remix.



Ladle 1/4 c. of batter onto the hot griddle.

Tilt the pan, if necessary, to spread the batter into a 5" to 6" circle.

As soon as bubbles raise in the batter and the pancake loosens from the griddle, turn it with a spatula and cook the other side.

The finished pancake should be a golden to medium brown. It takes a bit of practice and timing to produce a perfect pancake. Jerry is the master blini fryer...tortillas, too!

Set the pancake aside in a warm place and repeat with rest of batter.

Blini are best served warm.

Top with a spoonful of desired topping and fold to eat.

Blini can be refrigerated or frozen, but it is not recommended for the best texture result. They will become brittle and break instead of gently bending causing your topping to leak out.



Suggested Toppings:

For savory blini: sour cream, smoked fish, pickled herring, red and black caviar, farmers cheese, minced cooked meat with onions, etc.

For sweet blini: jams or preserves, sweetened condensed milk, honey or birch syrup, etc.



Пирожки: Pirozhki (small filled pastries)

Dough

Mix together:

1 1/2 c. all purpose flour
(or a blend of 1 c. all purpose and 1/4 c. specialty flour of choice)
3/4 t. salt
1/4 t. baking soda

Cut in

1/2 c. butter (1 stick, if using unsalted butter, increase salt from 3/4 t. to 1 t.)
Lightly working the mixture until it is crumbly

Blend together:

1/2 c. sourdough starter
1 t. yeast
1 beaten egg

And pour into flour mixture, stirring gently until mixture is thoroughly moistened, but do not overwork dough as that will cause gluten strands to develop and prevent a flaky crust. Refrigerate dough well while making filling.

Divide dough into 2 parts, working with one half, roll out on a lightly floured surface to a rough square about 1/8" thick.

Cut into 12 squares about 3" to 4" on a side. Trim any rough edges and use to patch any holes or places where additional dough is needed.

Pat out each small square as much as possible without tearing.

Place about 1 T. filling (or as much as it will comfortably hold) in the center of each square.



Fold over the opposing corners to form a triangle and pinch edges with the tines of a fork to seal.

Or form into other shapes as desired, pinching edges to seal as best as possible. If the filling is well chilled and firm, it should not leak.

Poke a few small holes in the dough over the filling to allow steam to escape during baking.

Place on a baking sheet. And repeat with second half of dough.

Allow to raise 20-40 minutes at room temperature.

Bake at 350° F for 25-30 minutes or until crust is lightly browned.

Remove and serve warm (makes 24 appetizer sized pirozhki).



Savory Meat and Vegetable Filling

Saute in 1 T. butter:

1/2 c. country style pate, coarsely crumbled (or cooked ground meat, or any leftover chopped cooked meats)

1/4 c. chopped leeks

4 coarsely chopped medium mushrooms

1/2 c. finely sliced cabbage

Add salt and freshly ground pepper to taste.

Refrigerate filling until thoroughly chilled and firmed up before using.



Other fillings may be used as desired. Both sweet and savory options are endless.

Onion Sourdough Bread – 2 Ways

(makes 1 medium loaf and 4 baguettes)

Bread #1: Onion Multi-Grain Sourdough

Combine:

1/2 c. sourdough starter

1 c. filtered water

2-3 T. honey

1 t. yeast

The following are optional, but make a better bread:

1/4 t. diastatic barley malt

1 T. powdered dry milk

1 t. powdered dried egg

1 T. potato flour

1 T. vital wheat gluten

1 T. flax seeds

3 T. dried chopped onion

1/4 c. 10 grain cereal or other cracked multi-grain meal

1/4 c. 10 grain flour or whole wheat flour

1/2 c. bread flour or all purpose flour

Allow to rest for about an hour.

Then add 1/2 T. salt.

Work in 1/2 c. more bread flour and 2 to 3 cups all purpose flour, kneading to make a smooth dough. Place in an oiled bowl, turning dough to coat evenly, cover and let raise until doubled in bulk. Punch down and place in an oiled pan and let raise til desired height.

Bread #2: Onion Rye Sourdough Baguettes

Combine:

1/2 c. sourdough starter

1 c. filtered water

2-3 T. molasses

1 t. yeast

The following are optional, but make a better bread:

- 1/4 t. diastatic barley malt
- 1 T. powdered dry milk
- 1 t. powdered dried egg
- 1 T. potato flour
- 1 T. vital wheat gluten

- 1/2 T. caraway seeds
- 3 T. dried chopped onion
- 1/4 c. cracked pumpernickel rye meal
- 1/4 c. dark rye flour
- 1/2 c. bread flour or all purpose flour

Allow to rest for about an hour and then add 1/2 T. salt.

Work in 1/2 c. more bread flour and 2 to 3 cups all purpose flour, kneading to make a smooth dough. Place in an oiled bowl, turning dough to coat evenly, cover and let raise until doubled in bulk. Punch down and divide into 4 equal pieces. Shape into long ovals and place on an oiled baguette pan or baking sheet and let raise til desired height.

Place both breads on a baking sheet. Bake both breads at 350° F for 35 minutes. Turn out multi-grain loaf onto the baking sheet for even browning. The baguettes may also be turned over, if desired. Bake and additional 10 minutes. (For a darker crust, increase baking time or temperature.) Remove from oven and allow to cool before slicing.



Ready for [zakuski](#) (appetizers), and don't forget the vodka:



Two Dead Mice Vodka

Select a clear decanter with neck wide enough to accommodate chilis.

Drop 2 dried Habanero chile peppers with their stems intact into the decanter.

Pour over one 4/5 quart bottle of Stolli or other good vodka. Stopper the decanter tightly and let it steep for at least a month, longer is better.

As they soak, the peppers will begin to wrinkle. They will give off some of their color and turn the vodka an amber to rose pink.

The rehydrated peppers will resemble two dead mice floating in the vodka. Add more mice to taste.



Christmas Day Dinner 2019

Brisket in Horseradish Sauce

Slice an approximately 2 lb Brisket about 3/4 of the way through into 3/4" to 1" slices from the fat side. Place it fat side down in a crock pot. Pour over about 2 T. tomato ketchup dissolved in about 1 c. white wine and top the meat with a bay leaf. Cover and cook on high for about 3 hours.

Turn the meat fat side up making sure the bay leaf is now under the meat. Cook 2 more hours.

Stir about 1/2 c. prepared horseradish into sauce and cook 1 more hour.

Remove meat and let stand for about 10 minutes. Remove the bay leaf and cut the meat slices the rest of the way through and place in a serving dish. Spoon sauce over meat and keep warm until serving. (about 4 servings)

Wild Rice

In a microwave safe dish, melt 2 T. butter and add about 1/4 c. thinly slivered leeks and 1/2 c. sliced Crimini mushrooms and stir fry until mushrooms have released their liquid. Add 1 1/2 c. water and 1 t. chicken bouillon. Bring to a boil and add 3/4 c. wild rice. Stir, cover and simmer until rice is fluffed and cooked, stirring occasionally. (about 4 servings)

Brussels Sprouts

Slice 1 to 2 c. Brussels Sprouts in half. In a microwave safe dish, melt 2 T. butter. Cover and butter steam until done, stirring occasionally. (about 2 servings)

Fruitcake Style Filled Bread

Drain 1 can of red tart cherries (net weight 14.5 oz. /114 g.) reserving cherries and juice.

Measure out 1/2 c. sourdough starter into a bowl. Add enough water to the cherry juice to make 1 c. and stir into the starter. Stir in the following, one ingredient at a time:

2 to 3 T. honey
1 t. yeast
1/4 t. ground mace
1/2 t. ground nutmeg
1 t. ground ginger
1 t. ground cinnamon
1 T. minced dried lemon peel

The following are optional, but make a better bread:

1/4 t. diastatic barley malt
1 t. dried powdered egg
1T. potato flour
1 T. dry milk
1 T. vital wheat gluten

Stir in:

1/4 c. barley grits (cracked barley grain)
1/2 c. bread flour

Let dough rest to proof yeast.

Stir in 1/2 T. salt and work in 1/2 c. more bread flour and enough all purpose flour to make a smooth dough. Lightly coat with oil and raise in a covered bowl until double in bulk.

Pat dough out into a rectangle. Evenly spread about 6 oz./170 g. of a spiced mixed fruit preserve onto dough leaving about 1 1/2" uncovered on the short sides. Sprinkle an even coat of brown sugar over fruit preserves. Top with the reserved cherries and add more brown sugar as desired.



Starting at one of the short sides, roll the dough up jelly roll style.



Place in an oiled bundt pan curving to fill the pan or place on a greased baking sheet. Let raise in a warm place until doubled in bulk.

Bake at 350° F for 45 minutes.



Allow to cool to let any juices set before removing from pan. (makes 1 medium loaf)

Vanilla Walnut Filled Bread with Peaches

(makes 1 medium loaf)

The night before put 1-2 c. dried peach slices in a jar. Add water to just cover the fruit. Cover and let stand overnight at room temperature to reconstitute.

The next day drain peaches, reserving the liquid. Add enough water to the liquid to make 1 c.

Mix together:

1/2 c. sourdough starter
1 c. water and peach juice mixture
2-3 T. honey
1 t. yeast
1 t. vanilla
1/4 c. coarsely ground black walnuts
1/4 t. diastatic barley malt
1 T. dry milk
1 t. powdered dried egg
1 T. potato flour
1 T. garbanzo bean flour
1 t. vital wheat gluten
1/4 c. barley grits (cracked barley grain)
1/4 c. barley flour
1/2 c. bread flour

Cover and let rest about an hour to proof.

Stir in 1/2 T. salt and 1/2 c. more bread flour. Work in enough all purpose flour, kneading to make a smooth dough.

Coat with oil and raise in a covered bowl until doubled in bulk.

Pat out into a rectangle. Evenly sprinkle with brown sugar. Spread a layer of reconstituted dried peaches onto the dough leaving about 1 1/2" uncovered on the short sides. Sprinkle an even coat of brown sugar over the peaches. Starting at one of the short sides, roll the dough up jelly roll style.

Place in an oiled bundt pan curving to fill the pan or place on a greased baking sheet.

Let raise in a warm place until doubled in bulk. Bake at 350° F for 45 minutes.

Chocolate Carob Peanut Butter Filled Bread

(makes 1 medium loaf)

Mix together:

1/2 c. sourdough starters
1 c. water
2-3 T. honey
1 t. yeast
1/4 t. diastatic barley malt
1 T. dry milk
1 t. powdered dried egg
1 T. potato flour
1 t. vital wheat gluten
1 T. cocoa powdered
1/4 c. toasted carob powder
1/4 c. barley grits (cracked barley grain)
1/4 c. barley flour
1/2 c. bread flour

Cover and let rest about an hour to proof.

Stir in 1/2 T. salt and 1/2 c. more bread flour. Work in enough all purpose flour, kneading to make a smooth dough.

Coat with oil and raise in a covered bowl until doubled in bulk.

Pat out into a rectangle. Evenly spread a layer of crunchy style peanut butter onto dough leaving about 1 1/2" uncovered on the short sides. Sprinkle an even coat of brown sugar over the peanut butter.

Starting at one of the short sides, roll the dough up jelly roll style.





Place in an oiled bundt pan curving to fill the pan or place on a greased baking sheet.

Let raise in a warm place until doubled in bulk.

Bake at 350° F for 45 minutes.



“Clean out the Fridge/Freezer/Pantry”

(Many of my dinner recipes start by having some sort of leftover that needs to be used up before it sits too long...like that package of meat marinated in some exotic sauce that you got on an impulse from some fashionable grocery store. The one that never lived up to the description on the label. You used half of it and put the rest in the freezer. Yeah, you know the one. It's sitting there icily staring at you every time you open the door, daring you to come up with some way to make it taste better. In my experience, most store bought marinated meats are woefully under-seasoned.

It's the time to clean out the fridge/freezer/pantry. These are a few of those.)

Chicken and Polenta

(2 servings)

Thaw half a package of store prepared Pollo Asada and cut it into 1/2" to 3/4" dice. Melt about 2 T. butter in a microwave safe pot and work in about 2 t. Achioté paste until it forms a smooth paste. Add the chicken pieces and stir well to coat with the mixture. Let the chicken marinate for about 30 minutes.

Cook the chicken on Combination #3 (or bake 325° F) for a few minutes at a time stirring occasionally until almost done (about 8-10 minutes). Remove and set meat aside.

In the same pot, melt about 2 T. butter. Add about a quarter cup of thinly sliced leeks and half a 15 oz. can of drained corn niblets (reserve the can liquid).

Cook on Combination #3 a few minutes at a time until the vegetables take on a bit of color.

Add to the reserved corn liquid, 1 t. tomato chicken bouillon, and enough milk to make about 1 3/4 c. total. Add to vegetables and heat on microwave #8 for 5 minutes.

Stir in 3/4 c. corn meal and cook on low microwave setting, stirring often until thickened and cooked through.

Return chicken to pot along with any drippings and reheat for about 5 minutes.

Inside Out Stuffed Cabbage Casserole

(2 servings)

This started with a large bag of frozen liquid mushroom gravy mix that I got from a store. I subdivided it into more usable containers and returned it to the freezer. It was an OK tasting mixture and had no real offensive ingredients, so I used it as a base to other casseroles.

Cut 1 large boneless pork chop into 1/2" dice. Finely slice 1/4 c. of leeks and 1/2 c. of green cabbage. Strain 1/2 c. of mushrooms and 1/2 c. of sauce liquid from the mixture. Add 1/2 c. of unsalted home made stock to the sauce and enough water to make 1 1/2 c. total. Add 1 t. beef bouillon, 1 t. dill weed and a few grinds of black pepper to the sauce mixture and heat briefly to dissolve seasonings.

In a microwave safe pot, add about 1 T. fat, the cubed pork and a few grinds of black pepper. Cook on Combination #3 until the meat is almost done, about 10 minutes, stirring often. Set the meat aside. Add the leeks, cabbage and mushrooms to the pot and microwave on medium high until the veg is sweated. Add 3/4 c. arborio rice and stir fry a few minutes. Add the sauce mixture and microwave on medium high until rice is done, stirring occasionally, and adding more water as needed. Return meat to pot and reheat for serving.



These vacuum filled double walled stainless steel bowls that we got from Ali Express in China are GREAT for keeping food warm in the winter! Also great for hot soup, when you can hold the bowl without burning your fingers.

Chicken and Sourdough Dumplings

(about 4 servings)

Chicken Stew

Cut up one or more slices of bacon into 1/4" dice to make about 1/4 c. chopped bacon. Place it in a crock pot set on a medium to high setting and stir often to render the bacon of some of its fat. Cut up 2 boneless and skinless chicken breasts into 1" dice, and add to pot, stirring to coat meat with fat. Cook until meat has a slight sear.

Stir in 2 large carrots and 1 large potato cut into 1/2" dice, and a small handful of coarsely chopped garlic. Add half of a 10+ oz. can of condensed cream of chicken soup (from the freezer and thawed), the liquid from a 15 oz. can of peas and 1 bay leaf. Stir to evenly distribute ingredients. Add enough water to cover the ingredients plus about a half of an inch of liquid on top. Cover and cook on high several hours until the meat and veg are tender.

Remove the bay leaf and add salt and pepper to taste, any other seasonings, and a small handful of dried chopped onion. Add the canned peas, which are already cooked and only need to be warmed up. Cover and let simmer for about a half hour while you make the dumpling dough.

Sourdough Dumplings

(This recipe is still in progress and needs more work. It was adapted from an earlier recipe that called for 2 eggs, beaten, 1/4 t. salt, 1/2 lb. cottage cheese, and 3/4 c. flour, which worked well. I will try using the original amount of cheese and perhaps adding more flour.)

Combine:

- 1/4 c. sourdough starter
- 1/8 t. baking soda
- 1-2 t. baking powder (use more if the baking powder is old)
- 1/4 lb. cottage cheese
- 2 eggs, beaten
- 3/4 c. all purpose flour (or a mix of 1/2 c. flour and 1/4 c. corn meal)

Beat mixture together and drop by large spoonfuls on top of boiling stew. Cover and simmer 1/2 hour.



Chicken in Pomegranate Sauce with Peach Pilaf

(this is done in a combination oven using microwave and convection modes, substitute stove top and oven preparation where appropriate – makes 2 servings)

Cut 2 boneless, skinless chicken breasts into 3/4" dice, and thinly slice 1/4th of a medium onion. Put about 1 T. oil or melted rendered fat in a microwave safe casserole and spread to coat the bottom. Add chicken and onion, top with a couple of tablespoons of concentrated pomegranate juice, stir to evenly coat the meat and let marinate for about a half of an hour.

Stir fry on Combination #3 setting (325° F) 3 minutes at a time until meat mixture is almost done. Remove meat and onions and set aside.

Melt 1 T. butter and add 3/4 c. Basmati rice. Stir to coat and saute a couple of minutes. Add 1/4 c. dried peach slices broken into 1/2" pieces, and 2 T. pine nuts. Stir and saute lightly for a minute or two. Stir in 1 T. dried chopped onion, 1 1/2 c. water, 1 t. chicken bouillon, and 1/4 t. saffron. Microwave on #8 for 5 minutes and stir. Repeat, simmering, until rice is almost done, adding more water if needed, and let rest to absorb all liquid.

Return chicken and onions to the pot. Stir and reheat to serve.

Chicken with Potatoes, Artichokes, and Olives

(2 servings)

Saute 1/4 thinly sliced medium onion and 2 roughly chopped slices of bacon in 1 T. butter, vegetable or chicken fat until lightly browned.

Add 2 boiling potatoes cut into rough chunks, 12 pitted Kalamata olives, and one 14 oz. can of artichoke quarters (drained and rinsed, about 80 g).

Stir together 1/2 c. stock, 1/4 c. white wine, 1/2 t. bullion (or salt to taste), 1 t. Dijon mustard, 1/4 t. granulated garlic (or crushed fresh garlic cloves) and freshly ground pepper and pour over vegetable mixture. Top vegetables with 2 whole chicken thighs and bake uncovered at 325° F (or Combination #3) for about an hour or until chicken tests done and potatoes are tender.

Sourdough Crackers

(This is a recipe in progress. I adapted a recipe for home made Saltine crackers adding sourdough starter. But, it is still in the experimental stage and I have not yet perfected the recipe.)

Mix 1 c. all purpose flour and 1/4 t. salt. Stir in 2 T. melted butter and 1/4 c. sourdough starter. Additional flour may be needed to prevent sticking.

Roll dough out to 1/8" thickness and cut into cracker shapes. Place on baking sheet and bake at 400° F for 15 minutes. Let cool. Optional: brush with melted butter and add a sprinkle of salt.

Options: add any seasonings or dried herbs to dough before or after rolling it out or as toppings. The idea of adding fresh onions, mustard, or horseradish is appealing

More Recipes to Develop

Other breads I want to experiment with include other flat breads like Middle Eastern pita and naan. I also want to try classic French bread, English muffins and strudel dough.

I want to try experimenting with sourdough pasta. Pasta is basically flour and water and so is sourdough. The proportions will have to be determined. And, it will probably work best as a fresh pasta, rather than drying it. Pelmeni dough and gnocchi would fall into this category as well.

Somewhat related to pasta would be Yorkshire Pudding: water or milk, eggs, flour and salt cooked in the drippings from a beef roast. Also, oven pancakes which are also eggs, milk, flour and salt, but cooked in melted butter. Each of these could have additional flavor ingredients, such as: onions, mushrooms, vegetables or fruits, bacon or ham, and cheeses.

I have an old magazine that has recipes for sourdough muffins, cookies and cakes. Someday I will experiment with those.

When I add in sourdough starter to a recipe, I usually replace 1/4 to 1/2 c. of the liquid called for with slightly more sourdough starter as it has a much thicker consistency than most liquids. Then, it's a matter of trying until the ending product has the right texture.

Hybrid Flour/Corn Sourdough Tortillas

(This recipe is also still in progress. I adapted a recipe that I made up for home made flour tortillas that works really well and tastes so much better than store bought tortillas. This works best with two people, one to flatten and roll out the dough while the other one cooks it.)

I replaced part of the liquid in the original recipe with sourdough starter. But, it is still in the experimental stage and I have not yet perfected the recipe. The original recipe called for 2 c. all purpose flour, 1 t. baking powder, and 1 t. salt. 5 T. (1/3 c.) butter, and 8-12 T. (3/4 c.) water or milk. The method is the same.)

Combine:

1 1/4 c. all purpose flour
1/2 c. dry masa or corn flour
1/4 c. finely ground corn meal
1 t. baking powder
1 t. salt

Cut in 5 T. (1/3 c) of butter until crumbly. Mix together 1/2 sourdough starter and 1/4 c. milk or water (milk makes it richer), and mix into dough. Knead until smooth, adding additional flour or water as needed.

Cover dough and allow to rest for 30 minutes. Divide dough into 6 or 8 pieces, depending on the size of the tortillas desired. Form each piece into a ball. Using a tortilla press, flatten each ball as much as possible. The dough will be somewhat springy and will need to be rolled out further to get it as thin as possible. Keep the tortillas covered so as to not dry out during the cooking process.

On an ungreased cast iron griddle pan over medium heat, fry each tortilla until it releases from the pan, turn and fry until lightly colored on both sides. Keep the tortillas covered to stay warm, while the rest are being cooked.

Options: add some dry sweet buttermilk to the milk for added richness, or crushed garlic cloves may also be added for flavor.

When the squirrels are stripping the trees of our precious fruit and the raccoons are scratching at the chicken run to get to the coop, it's time to thin the herd.

Two culprits caught in the act on our night vision infrared game camera.

Warning, these creatures are all sharp teeth and claws and very strong.



Roast Wild Beast Recipes

Skinning and Preparing:

When skinning these animals, make sure to carefully remove any small glands that are between the skin and meat. They are scent glands and can be very strong and bitter in flavor. They appear to look like small white nodules and they can damage the flavor of the meat if left in or cut open.

Butchering:

Both squirrels and raccoons are cut into 6 portions of 4 legs, ribs, and saddle, plus heart, liver and kidneys. Break down the portions at the joints to conserve space in the freezer and better fit in crock pot. Other edible offal (brain, lungs, spleen, genitals, & tail, but not guts) are cut into small pieces and simmered in some water to give to the chickens. All this tasty protein seems to give them really shiny coats.

Cooking:

All wild game is very muscular and can be very tough. Consequently these types of meat respond well to good marinades and slow cooking. All of these recipes work well in either a crockpot or a solar oven. Of course any other meat that can be slow cooked can be substituted in these recipes.

Raccoon and Beans

(makes about 4 healthy servings)

About 2 cups dried beans that were soaked over night, rinsed, drained, and placed in the large crock pot with one leg of raccoon. Covered with a mix of 1 cup stock, 1 cup white wine, and water. (ready to start cooking)



Cover and cook on high heat several hours, until meat is tender and pulls away from the bone.

Remove meat from bones (reserve bones for stock), and cut into bite sized pieces. Return to pot, add any desired vegetables, and continue to cook on low heat until beans are tender, season to taste and serve.

Pot Roast Raccoon

(this was really rich in flavor and we got about 10 servings off of it)

Place in crock pot: raccoon ribs and neck, add any leftover drippings or veg stock (I keep a plastic bottle in my freezer for such things to use in making stock), some tomato juice, a cup of white wine, and enough water to fill pot to 2/3 height of meat. Cover and cook on high several hours until meat falls away from the bone. Cut into chunks, return to pot liquid, season to taste, simmer to mingle flavors and serve. Reserve any leftover "gravy" for other meals (pasta sauces, etc.).

Raccoon Minestrone

(4 servings)

Sear raccoon 1 leg and place in crock pot with about 2 cups of stock and simmer til meat pulls away from the bone (couple of hours). Remove, let cool to touch, and debone meat. Cut into bite size pieces and return to soup. Add a handful of dried or fresh mushrooms, about 4 diced medium tomatoes, and any other vegetables of choice. Simmer until veg are done. Add 1 small can of V8 or tomato juice, a handful of chopped leeks, 1 can of beans (kidney/pinto/etc.) with liquid, a pinch of red pepper flakes, and 1/4 to 1/2 cup of dry pasta. Let simmer until pasta is done, adding any additional liquid if needed. Season to taste with salt or bouillon crumbles. Top servings with Parmesan cheese if desired.

Squirrel Recipes

Basic cooking method for the following squirrel recipes:

Sear 1 cut up squirrel in a little oil or fat until lightly browned. Add about a cup of liquid (water or stock). Simmer until tender. Season to taste and serve. One average squirrel will serve two people.

I use a combination microwave and convection oven for most of my cooking. In this method, it's Combination #3 (which equals a 325° F oven) for about 30 minutes, and then cover and microwave simmer on low until tender.

I usually cook pasta, rice or couscous in stock thinned with a little water in the microwave until al dente and most of stock is absorbed. (1/4 lb of pasta, 3/4 cup rice, 1 cup couscous to 1 1/2 cup stock and water mix...additional water as needed)

Squirrel Stew #1

(2 servings)

Use Basic Cooking Method and add with cooking liquid to some sliced onions, cut up carrots and cubed potatoes.

Squirrel Tagine

(2 servings)

Use Basic Cooking Method and add with cooking liquid some sliced onions, chunks of eggplant, pitted olives if desired, and ras el hanout to taste. Serve over Israeli Couscous. (Ras el Hanout, or Ras al Hanout means “top of the shop” and is a complex Moroccan blend of up to 26 aromatic spices and peppers. I have found a good blend at Zamouri Spices, www.zamourispices.com)

Squirrel with Sage and Garlic

(2 servings)

Use Basic Cooking Method and add some chicken stock, white wine, crumbled sage leaves, sliced onion and garlic. Salt to taste. Remove cooked meat and cook wide egg noodles in sauce until al dente. Add small chunk of butter and stir into noodles. Serve meat over noodles.

Squirrel with Sage and Butter

(2 servings)

Saute 1/8 onion, slivered, in 1 tablespoon butter (microwave ~6 minutes on #8), add squirrel & toss to coat with butter, cook on Combination #3 for 15 minutes. Add 3/4 cup white wine, 1/4 cup water, and 1 teaspoon chicken bouillon. Simmer for 10 minutes on microwave #7 and repeat until almost done. Then add 1/4 teaspoon sage and continue cooking. When done, add ~1/2 teaspoon potato starch, and simmer to thicken sauce.

Squirrel over Pasta in a Mushroom Cream Sauce

(2 servings)

Coat squirrel pieces with ~1 T. chicken fat and brown in combination oven on Combination #3 setting for 15 minutes, turn over and repeat for 10 minutes. Add 1 c. rich chicken stock, 1/2 c. white wine, 1/2 t. chicken bouillon, and ~1 t. herbs de province. Simmer on microwave #7 for about an hour, testing every 15 minutes and adding water as needed til tender. Remove squirrel meat and set aside to keep warm in covered bowl. Add to stock, a dash of turmeric, a dash of powdered garlic, a handful of dried Portabella mushrooms and 1/2 can cream of mushroom soup and simmer for 5 minutes. Add 1/4 lb uncooked egg noodles and simmer until almost done (adding water as needed). Add ~1 T. Port Salut soft cheese and simmer 5 minutes. Add ~1 c. thawed frozen peas and simmer 5 minutes. Serve pasta topped with squirrel meat.

Squirrel with Mushroom Risotto

(2 servings)

Coat squirrel pieces with ~1 T. chicken fat and brown in combination oven at Combination #3 setting for 15 minutes, turn over and repeat for 10 minutes. Add 1 c. rich chicken stock, 1/2 c. white wine, 1 t. chicken bouillon, a sprinkle of garlic granules or chopped garlic and ~1 t. herbs de province. Simmer on microwave #7 for ~1 hour, testing every 15 minutes and adding water as needed until tender. Remove squirrel meat and set aside to keep warm in covered bowl. Measure stock and add water to make 1 1/2 c. Saute 1/4 chopped onion in 1 t. chicken fat. Add 3/4 c. Arborio rice and saute 2 minutes. Add a handful of dried mushrooms, optional chopped veg of choice, and stock. Simmer til done (adding water as needed). Serve risotto with squirrel meat.

Squirrel Stew #2

(2 servings)

Cut 2 slices of bacon in half and precook on Combination #3 to render some fat. Place squirrel pieces in dish and top with the bacon slices. Cook on Combination #3 for 10 minutes, remove bacon, turn over and replace the bacon on top of the meat and repeat for 10 minutes. Set aside the meat and bacon. Add 4 medium potatoes, cut in 3/4" dice, 8 small carrots, sliced. Shred the bacon slices and add. Add 1/2 c. white wine, 1/2 c. stock, 2 bay leaves, and top with meat. Simmer on microwave #7 for 40 minutes. Add 1/2 c. sliced leeks, and 1/4 c. cut green beans, and simmer til done on microwave #7 for 20 minutes.

Brick Cake



The inspiration...many decades ago, I saw this ad in a cooking magazine and thought, "some day, I have to make this cake!"

I want to try a small version just to verify the concept...making a mini-brick cake. Making a sheet cake and cutting it into bricks just won't work as the cut edge would show the inner crumbly texture and not have the smooth finish of the baked edge.

The main challenge is a straight sided pan that I can get the cake out of without damaging the texture. Not wanting to

invest in new pans right now...just more stuff to have to pack when we move.

But, working with what I have on hand, I need to construct "walls" for existing pans.

Jerry offered some sheets of very thin tin coated steel which was much heavier than aluminum foil and should work perfectly. So I cut them into 2" wide strips and bent them to fit into an 8" by 8" square pan making 6 bricks that were about 2 1/2" by 4". I borrowed a few small alligator clips from the electronics bench to hold the strips in place. I put a square of parchment paper under the forms to protect the pan from the sharp edges and help release the cake from the pan.



The cake recipe:

Stir 1 c. brown sugar into 6 T. melted butter. Beat in 2 eggs and 1 t. vanilla (or other extract or liqueur).

Sift together: 1 1/2 purpose flour, 1/2 t. baking soda, 1/2 t. salt, and 3 T. cocoa powder and 2 T. carob powder (or 5 T. cocoa powder). Beat dry ingredients into butter sugar mix alternating with 1/2 c. sourdough starter.

Dissolve 1 oz. grenadine syrup in 3 oz. hot water and stir into mix.

Pour into the partitioned pan that has been greased and lined with parchment paper.



Bake at 350° F for 35-40 minutes.



(Note: we used the toaster oven lowering the temperature to 325° F and shortened the time to 30 minutes, but the heat was a still a bit too intense and scorched the top a bit...tasted good, though.)

Allow to cool completely before separating "bricks".





Stack the “bricks”, mortaring in between with dark chocolate icing.

Icing recipe:

Beat 1/4 t. salt, 1 t. vanilla, 2 T. carob powder, 3 T. cocoa powder, and 1 1/2 brown sugar into 6 T. softened butter.

It will be very thick/stiff, but it's supposed to resemble cement.

Results and comments:

The parchment paper gave the best texture for the baked edge so in the future all edges should be baked against parchment paper.

I used the grenadine syrup both for flavor and for color, but it didn't give as much red color to the dough as I wanted. I don't like using food coloring, so maybe just more syrup next time.

A larger quantity of icing would cover the bricks better...I didn't make enough, so only mortared a few bricks for the above photo (the camera didn't like the dark color).

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The world changes, learn to adapt!