

Life Around My Table by Diana Amato

Rustic Country Bread

Overnight Starter (Biga)

Ingredients:

1 cup cool to lukewarm water

(The way that I determine this temperature is to run water at the kitchen sink. When I can no longer feel the water temperature on my fingers, warm or cold, it's good to go.)

1/2 tsp active dry yeast

1 1/4 cups all purpose unbleached flour (King Arthur)

1/4 cup whole wheat flour (King Arthur)

Dough

Ingredients:

All of the starter

1 cup lukewarm water (see notes above about water temperature)

3/4 tsp active dry yeast

1 scant Tbsp sugar

3 1/2 (+/-) cups all purpose flour, plus more for dusting the dough during the kneading process

1/4 cup whole wheat flour

2 tsp fine sea salt

Method:

To make starter:

1. Combine all of the starter ingredients in a bowl and stir into a thick pudding. Cover with plastic wrap and allow to sit overnight.

To make dough:

2. Stir down the starter with a spoon.

3. In a large mixing bowl, add the starter, water, yeast, sugar, 3 1/4 cups of the flour, and salt. Stir thoroughly and let it rest for 15-20 minutes. This resting period will allow the flour time to absorb the liquid and produce a final product with more air holes because you will use less flour during the kneading process.

4. On a flat surface, knead the dough, adding up to 1/2-3/4 cup additional all purpose flour to produce a soft dough. 10-13 minutes. (You will notice at this point that the dough will be soft to the touch and really won't stick to your hands anymore)

5. Place the dough in a lightly greased bowl and cover with lightly greased plastic wrap, and let it rise until almost doubled in size. (this will take approximately 1-2 hours, depending on the weather)

6. Deflate the dough gently, taking care not to deflate all of the air. (this will create the small air holes in the rustic bread) Form the dough into either one large round ball or two smaller ones.

7. On a parchment lined baking sheet, sprinkle a little semolina flour or cornmeal on to the parchment. Gently place the dough ball(s) smooth side up.
8. Once again cover the dough with greased plastic wrap and let it rise until it grows in size by half. This usually takes about 45 minutes.
9. Preheat the oven to 450F.
10. Make a couple of thin slashes across the top of the bread with a very sharp knife. Place the bread in the oven and reduce the heat to 425F.
11. Bake the bread for 25-30 minutes, or until it becomes a rich golden color. The bake time will be a few minutes less if there are two loaves, so be watchful.
12. Remove the bread from the oven and allow to cool on a rack.

