

YOUR FREE READER'S COMPANION

The Sourdough Rescue Companion

A companion to The No-Confusion Sourdough Cookbook · by Nora Bexley

Thanks for picking up the book. This is the part you keep where you bake: the one-page tools that take the confusion out of sourdough and let you fix a loaf on the spot instead of guessing. Tape the rescue guide inside a cupboard door, keep the cue cards nearby when you check your dough, and use the schedules to plan a bake around your real life. Every number and fix here is pulled straight from the book, no filler.

Almost nobody fails at sourdough because they lack talent. They fail because they follow the clock instead of the dough, and because when something goes wrong they have no idea what the loaf is trying to tell them. That is the whole thing this page fixes. Watch the dough, not the timer. And when a loaf comes out wrong, don't start over from scratch, look it up, pull one lever, and try again. You are closer than you think. — Nora

My Loaf Is... The Rescue Guide

When something goes sideways, find the symptom and pull the one lever next to it. Change one thing per bake so you learn what fixed it.

Your starter

Symptom	Quick fix
Won't rise	Keep warm at 75-80F (24-27C), feed daily, give a new one 10-14 days
Smells like nail polish	It's hungry; feed it more often
Gray liquid (hooch) on top	Underfed; pour it off or stir it in, then feed
Fuzzy colored mold	Throw it out and start over; mold is not rescued

Your dough

Symptom	Quick fix
Too sticky to handle	Wet your hands, add folds, use a little less water next time
Won't rise	Warm it up, confirm the starter was at peak, give it more time
Slack and soupy	Overproofed; bake it now, shorten the rise next time

Your baked loaf

Symptom	Quick fix
Flat or spread out	Shape tighter, bake a touch earlier, use a lidded pot
Dense and gummy inside	Underproofed, or sliced too warm; cool fully, proof longer
Too sour	Use starter at peak, shorten the rise, try a cold overnight proof
Pale, soft crust	Bake hotter at 450F (232C), keep the lid on to trap steam
Crust too hard	Take the lid off later, or drop the temperature slightly
No ear at the score	Score deeper, add steam, underproof very slightly
Burnt bottom	Raise the rack, add a tray underneath, bake on parchment
Stuck to the pot	Always bake on parchment paper

Reading Your Loaf

Your loaf is a report card. Learn these four cue cards and you can self-correct on purpose instead of by luck.

- Starter at peak. Domed, bubbly, at its highest point a few hours after feeding. Drop a spoonful in water: if it floats, it's full of gas and ready to bake with. If it sinks, feed it and give it more time.
- Dough ready after bulk. It has grown by about half, looks puffy and jiggly, and shows a few bubbles on the surface. That, not the clock, is your green light to shape.
- The crumb, cooled fully (2 hours). Tight and dense with a compact strip near the base means underproofed: more bulk time, warmer kitchen. Big ragged holes over a gummy base, or a flat spread loaf, means overproofed: shorten the rise or ferment cooler. Open and even with a soft spring is the target, note the timing.
- A good ear. A clean, lifted flap where you scored means good oven spring. No ear usually means overproofed or too little steam.

One caution: a damp, claggy crumb on a well-risen loaf is almost always slicing too soon, not underbaking. Wait the full two hours before you judge it.

The Numbers You Actually Need

Baker's percentage in one line: flour is always 100%, and every other ingredient is a percentage of the flour weight, so multiply the flour weight by the percentage to get grams.

Worked example (500g flour): water at 70% = $500 \times 0.70 = 350\text{g}$. Starter at 20% = $500 \times 0.20 = 100\text{g}$. Salt at 2% = $500 \times 0.02 = 10\text{g}$. Want a smaller loaf? Start from 350g flour and run the same math; the bread stays the same.

A simple white loaf formula

Ingredient	Baker's %	Weight
Bread flour	100%	500g
Water	~70%	350g
Active starter	~20%	100g
Salt	~2%	10g

Key conversions (a scale beats cups every time)

Ingredient	1 cup, approximate
White bread flour	120g
Water	237g
Active starter (100% hydration)	227g

Grams	Flour, approx cups	Water, approx cups
100g	4/5 cup	2/5 cup
120g	1 cup	1/2 cup
500g	4 cups + 3 tbsp	2 cups + 2 tbsp

Oven: standard bake 450F (232C), hot bake 475F (246C). Handy weights: 1 oz = 28g, 1 lb = 454g, 1 tsp salt = about 6g.

Same-Day and Overnight Schedules

Sourdough runs on your schedule, not the other way around. Same dough, two timelines. Warm and more starter is faster; cold slows everything down without hurting a thing.

Same-day (start morning, bake by dinner)

1. Morning: stir 150g starter into 350g warm water, add 500g flour + 10g salt, mix to a shaggy ball.
2. First few hours: rest 30 min, then 4 sets of stretch-and-folds, 30 minutes apart.
3. Bulk rise in a warm spot (~78F/26C) until grown by about half, domed and jiggly, roughly 3-4 hours.
4. Shape into a tight round, rest seam-up in a floured bowl.
5. Final rise 1-2 hours until it springs back slowly. Heat a Dutch oven to 475F (245C).
6. Bake 20 min covered, then 20-25 min uncovered until deep golden. Cool 1 hour before slicing.

Overnight (mix tonight, bake tomorrow)

1. Evening: mix 100g starter, 350g cool water, 500g flour, 10g salt.
2. Over 2 hours, do 3 sets of folds, then rest 1 more hour.
3. Shape into a round, place seam-up in a floured bowl.
4. Fridge overnight, 10-16 hours. By morning it's puffed and grown by about a third with small bubbles.
5. Morning: heat the Dutch oven to 475F (245C). No need to warm the dough.
6. Bake the cold loaf 20 min covered, then 20-25 min uncovered. Cool 1 hour.

Cold dough scores cleanly, holds its shape, and tastes tangier, a forgiving bake for beginners.

Your Free Sourdough Rescue

To carry this rescue guide into the kitchen, there's a free online companion for the book. It includes an interactive "my loaf is..." flowchart that walks you from symptom to likely cause to fix, so you can troubleshoot in the moment without flipping pages. It also gives you a printable starter tracker to record your feedings and peak times, and printable weekly schedules to plan bakes around a busy week. It stays updated, so as new questions come up, new answers get added. Keep it on your phone, or print it and tape it inside a cupboard door, right next to this page.