

Sourdough Onion & Sage Bread – Comfort du Jour

The generous amounts of onion and sage I've added to this loaf make it perfect for Thanksgiving stuffing or dressing, and you'll probably want to have an extra loaf on hand for leftover turkey sandwiches, too. Or you can follow my lead with any stale leftovers and turn them into savory croutons for salads and all the soups you'll be simmering during the autumn and winter months ahead.

One quick note: I strongly recommend measuring ingredients by weight when baking any kind of bread, but especially sourdough. Weight measuring takes the guesswork out of your ingredient ratios, and you can find an inexpensive, easy-to-use kitchen scale just about anywhere, including Walmart (where I bought mine).

INGREDIENTS – DAY ONE

PRE-FERMENT

30 g ripe starter (mine is 100% hydration), fed 8 – 12 hours earlier
63 g filtered water
66 g white whole wheat flour
25 g bread flour

Combine pre-ferment ingredients and leave overnight at room temperature, loosely covered.

SOAKER

45 g polenta (coarse grain corn grits)
65 g filtered water

Combine in a separate bowl and leave overnight at room temperature, loosely covered.

FINAL DOUGH – DAY TWO

Entire amount of pre-ferment mixture
75 g soaked polenta (this should be nearly exact when polenta is drained)
260 g filtered water (include in this the water that soaked the polenta)
355 g bread flour
55 g white whole wheat flour
1 tsp. ground poultry seasoning (or Bell's seasoning)
2 Tbsp. dried minced onions, soaked 15 minutes in just enough water to cover them
11 g salt
About 1 Tbsp. finely chopped fresh sage leaves

INSTRUCTIONS FOR FINAL DOUGH

1. Strain the soaked polenta over a bowl, and set aside the soaking water to mix with additional water for hydrating the dough.

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2. In the bowl of a stand mixer, combine the pre-ferment, soaked polenta and water. Mix with the paddle attachment for about two minutes, to blend the ingredients into a thick slurry. Meanwhile, combine the flours in a separate bowl and stir in the poultry seasoning.
3. Add the flour ingredients to the mixing bowl, all at once, and combine again with the paddle attachment until the dough balls up on the paddle and nothing is left on the sides of the bowl.
4. Scrape the dough from the paddle, scoop the rehydrated onions onto the top of the dough and sprinkle the salt over the onions to begin dissolving it. Cover the bowl and let it rest for at least 30 minutes or up to one hour.
5. After the rest time, switch to the kneading hook of the mixer and knead for about 4 minutes, or until all the onions appear to be evenly incorporated. Add the chopped sage to the mixer and knead again for about 6 minutes. At this point, the dough should be clearing the sides of the bowl, but with a slight stickiness. **Resist the temptation to add more flour.** Transfer the dough to a large, lightly oiled bowl and roll it around to coat. Cover and rest at room temperature for 30 minutes.
6. Do the first set of stretch-and-folds after 30 minutes, and twice more at 20-minute intervals. Using wet hands to avoid sticking, lift and pull one side of the dough over the top of itself, then rotate the bowl 180° to repeat on the other side of the dough. Rotate the bowl 90° and stretch and fold the other two sides. This action builds strength in the dough, and you will begin to notice significant changes after the second set. After the third set, cover and rest the dough 20 minutes before shaping.
7. Lift the dough from the bowl and shape it into a round or slightly oval shape by folding the edges toward the center and tightly tucking them underneath, repeating all the way around the bread dough until you feel a good bit of resistance. Pinch and seal the dough edges underneath the ball. Your dough ball should have some surface tension and no visible bubbles. If you encounter large bubbles, gently pinch between two fingers to release the gases, but do not poke holes in the dough.
8. Place the dough ball, seam side-down, onto a sheet of parchment paper. If you are using a lidded clay baker, I recommend cutting darts into the parchment to minimize wrinkling when the dough is transferred.
9. Transfer the dough on parchment to the clay baker, trim the excess parchment, cover the baker and rest at room temperature for about 90 minutes, or until dough has doubled in volume and appears very puffy. To test whether proofing is complete, give the dough a gentle poke with your finger. The dough should not easily bounce back. If it has not reached this stage, test after 15 more minutes.
10. Preheat oven to 450° F, with oven rack positioned in the bottom third of the oven. Remove the baker lid and score the bread, either with a lame or a sharp kitchen knife. The score cut should be about 1/2" deep, and you must be decisive with the scoring tool. Don't saw back and forth or drag the knife or you risk deflating the dough. The purpose of the score is to allow steam an easy escape.
11. Bake the bread, with the lid on the baker, for 20 minutes. Remove the lid and continue baking 25 more minutes. The bread is done when the internal temperature reaches 205° F. Immediately transfer the bread to a baking rack to cool.