

Basket loaf - whole wheat malt sourdough bread



A simple basket risen loaf is perhaps the easiest loaf to make and enjoy, provided you have previously collected a few pieces of essential equipment: a basket, an oven peel, a baking stone and a water tray to leave in the oven to produce oven humidity. A small oven is best since then the humidity will be well retained around the baking bread. A tray of water in the oven during preheating and baking helps to prevent excessive loss of moisture when baking in a large oven compared with the loaf size. Or of course baking several loaves together in a larger oven helps to retain oven humidity.

So that the basket loaf stands up nicely in the oven, the dough should be made fairly stiff. This means that less water is generally added to the dough for a basket loaf than for pan bread that would be supported as it rises in the oven.

Method

Amounts are for one basket loaf risen in a round basket with top diameter approximately 8-inches and depth 3-4 inches (20 x 10 cm)

Whole wheat flour basis: 500 grams

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For a half-sized loaf, to fit into a smaller basket, based on 250 grams whole wheat flour.

Step I. Sweet malt porridge preparation

<i>Ingredients</i>	<i>Amount in grams (full-size loaf) 500 gram basis</i>	<i>Amount in grams (half-size loaf) 250 gram basis</i>	<i>Bakers percent</i>
Whole wheat flour	50	25	10
Water at ambient temperature	200	100	40
Wheat malt (enzyme active)	25	12.5	5

[] In a saucepan, mix or whisk whole wheat flour and cold water to a smooth slurry. While stirring, heat to boiling, and continue cooking for a minute. *Notice that the mixture thickens to an evenly smooth porridge.*

[] When the porridge has cooled to less than 104°F (40°C) beat in all the enzyme active malt flour. Cover with lid and set aside for 60 minutes at 86°F(30°C). *The mixture should thin somewhat and become distinctly sweet tasting.*

Step II. Mixing the dough

<i>Ingredients</i>	<i>Amount in grams (full-size loaf 500 gram flour basis</i>	<i>Amount in grams (half-size loaf) 250 gram flour basis</i>	<i>Bakers percent</i>
Whole wheat flour	450	225	90
Salt	7.5	3.8	1.5
Water	125 – 175**	62.5 - 87.5**	25 -35**
Simple whole wheat sourdough starter	50	25	10

*** Total water in dough is 65 – 75% including 40% in porridge.*

Begin with the smaller amount of water. Use an amount of water to make a medium stiff dough.

[] In main mixing bowl, mix whole wheat flour and salt.

[] In a separate jug or bowl combine water and sourdough starter; add this mixture to main mixing bowl.

[] Add all of the sweet porridge from Step I, to the main mixing bowl.

[] Mix the dough for 5-10 minutes, until all the ingredients are evenly incorporated. *Final dough should be medium stiff, yet smooth and extensible. Add 5-10% more water if dough is too stiff.*

[] Press the dough down into a bowl or box with lid and leave to ferment and rise at 86°F (30°C) for 4 hours. *Dough should be puffy at the end of this time but may not rise to double the original volume. Total fermentation time from mixing until baking, needs to be long enough for enough acidity to develop to deactivate the malt alpha-amylase before baking. Heaviness in the finished bread may result and the flavor will be too sweet, if fermentation time is too short.*

Step III shaping and final rise

Water moistened hands, a clean board and a dough scraper are all that is needed to handle the dough. Do not sprinkle flour.

[] Punch dough down on a smooth surface and form into a disk 0.5-1 inch thick. Pick up an edge and fold and press it into the center. Repeat this all the way around the disk.

Bunch the disk and turn it over. Form a ball by rounding it tight, on the board and between your hands. Leave to rest at 86°F (30°C) under a moist towel for 15-30 minutes.

[] Line the basket with a dry linen towel.

[] Finally shape the dough piece by gently reshaping it into a ball as before. Lightly coat the ball of dough in flour and place it **seam side up** in the lined basket. Cover the dough with the ends of the linen towel. *Optionally splash the towel with water and place the covered basket dough in a closed plastic bag to conserve moisture.* Leave to rise at 86°F (30°C) for 2 hours.

Step IV Baking

[] Preheat oven for an hour at 375°F (191°C), with baking stone in place and a tray of water below or beside the baking stone, enough to last until the end of baking time.

[] Sprinkle flour onto the surface of the risen loaf in the basket. Invert the loaf onto an oven peel. Score the top using a serrated knife. Slide it onto the hot baking stone in the oven, with a short forward and back shoving movement. *Practice this when the oven is cold.* Bake the full-size loaf for 60 minutes, and half size loaf for 45 minutes at 375°F (191°C). *Note that the oven fills with steam, be careful when opening the oven door. **Have the venting-fan running and only part-way open the oven door initially** so that the excess steam escapes upwards and not into your face!*

[] After baking allow loaf to cool on a rack. Cool completely before cutting. Store loaf in a closed container, to conserve moisture. Restore crustiness by toasting slices or heating a loaf-piece for 15 minutes at 350 °F (177°C).