

An English Cottage Loaf – Introduction



Lately I've continued to enjoy Sonora wheat loaves made with relatively low hydration (50 – 60% with respect to the total flour, according to the batch). The stiffer doughs invited the creation of breads that did not need to be supported by basket or pan during the final rise, so I thought about the English Cottage Loaf. I remember my mother buying this Cottage Loaf as a white bread with a strong crispy crust in the 1940s. Elizabeth David's recollection is from the 1920s or '30s when she writes about the Cottage Loaf from the south of England during her childhood. *The crumb was creamy and soft, the crust was always a bit scorched on one side, although it was not hard or tough.* (Elizabeth David, *English Bread & Yeast Cookery*, 1977.)

Re-creating this loaf shape, as well as the creamy and soft crumb and delicate crust is a given with a lower hydration 100% whole Sonora wheat dough, and most likely other low hydration soft white wheat doughs. Even so, recreating this bread shape is reckoned to be difficult by some authors including Elizabeth David. Presumably it is difficult with floppy high hydration hard red wheat refined flour doughs. The stiffer doughs using lower hydration are much more forgiving to work with.

The realization that this is an English loaf style made particularly in the south of England where wheat is grown best, made me think of Akmolinka (*Triticum turgidum* ssp. *turgidum*) wheat grown recently in quantity at Paicines Ranch (San Benito County, CA). This Akmolinka is representative of so-called English wheat, described by Percival (John Percival, *The Wheat Plant*. 1921). Of course, this type of wheat would not have been the only type to be grown there. Soft wheat (*T. aestivum* ssp. *aestivum*) would also have been common.

Could stone ground 100% whole wheat Akmolinka flour in a sourdough leavened dough be a reproduction of a completely English Cottage Loaf? To explain Elizabeth David's childhood description of the Akmolinka Cottage Loaf texture as "creamy and soft", the south of England's countryside in the 1930s may have been

among the last regions in Britain to still be baking with local wheat, possibly wheat like Akmolinka where, after 1880 American or Canadian refined hard red wheat flour would eventually be used.

The common name for the Akmolinka type of wheat is rivet, cone or pollard wheat (*Triticum turgidum ssp. turgidum*). Akmolinka produces heads of wheat that are branched at the base, so perhaps we could call Akmolinka a cone wheat. This particular selection of Akmolinka came from North Kazakhstan, where the climate is described as temperate/ humid continental. It has been very little grown anywhere in the last 140 years, yet a successful Cottage Loaf trial using Akmolinka whole wheat flour, shows its great potential for 100% whole wheat baking. Percival describes several varieties of rivet wheat growing at their best in the Mediterranean region and the warmer areas of Western Europe, and also from Transcaucasia. California possesses a range of Mediterranean climates, so this is an encouragement to again grow and bake with fresh stone milled 100% whole wheat using these *Triticum turgidum ssp. turgidum* landrace varieties. For the farmer, Percival says this *T. turgidum ssp. turgidum* type of wheat can be the most productive of all wheat types!

An English Cottage Loaf

Preparing a stock of whole wheat sourdough starter

Note: It is important for success with this Cottage Loaf recipe, to prepare the starter in the following way. Your own well-established starter can probably be used as the initial source of mature starter, but it is important to allow the starter to mature again after replenishment in the way described below.

Other bakers may advocate a different regimen for their starters. Therefore, for success with any sourdough bread recipe, it is advisable to maintain and prepare the sourdough as described by the recipe author.

<i>Ingredients</i>	<i>*Bakers per cent (grams)</i>	<i>**Amounts for 119 grams of starter (grams)</i>
Whole wheat flour	100	50
***Enzyme active malt flour <i>or</i> ***Enzyme active malt flour with Vitamin C	1	0.5
Salt	1	0.5
Water	125	62.5
Mature sourdough starter from previous batch	10	5
Total	238 grams	119 grams

**Baker's per cent = Amounts with respect to 100 g flour*

***Enough for 2 x (500 g flour basis loaves) + replenishment of starter stock.*

****Purchase enzyme active malt, or see recipes for sprouted wheat and malt with vitamin C at www.wholegrainconnection.org*

[] In bowl, mix whole wheat flour and malt.

[] Separately in a jug, weigh out salt and dissolve in measured water. Add the mature starter from previous batch to the salty water. Mix well.

[] Pour the mix of salty water and starter into the flour. Mix well.

[] Cover bowl and allow to ferment at warm ambient temperature. Stir well twice daily.

[] Fermentation will be completed at some time after the initial gassing, when the mixture has become distinctly acidic (pH 3.5), and it has finally thinned and is no longer gassing. The final aroma will be pleasant, perhaps somewhat fruity, and a light coating of a surface ferment may appear. *Fermentation to completion (maturity) usually takes 1-3 days, according to temperature. E.g. Approximately 1 day at 86°F (30°C) or 3 days at 68°F (20°C)*

[] Store completely fermented mature whole wheat sourdough in a closed jar at refrigerator temperature, 40°F (4°C). Preferably use within a week. *Depending on the type of whole wheat flour, some separation of an aqueous layer, which darkens, may occur. Stir the mixture together again before use.*

An English Cottage Loaf – recipe

Suggested for 100% whole wheat flours from soft white (e.g. Sonora), durum (e.g. Durum-Iraq) and cone or turgidum wheat (e.g. Akmolinka). Low hydration will likely also allow this shape to be made with 100% whole hard red and spelt wheat types.

You'll notice that this recipe is very similar to my other recent recipes. Variation in the dough formula is mainly in the amount and type of oil or fat and the amount of water. The method for producing the dough in each case is essentially the same.

<i>Ingredients</i>	<i>Bakers per cent (grams)</i>	<i>Amounts for half size loaf (grams)</i>	<i>Amounts for one loaf (grams)</i>
Whole wheat flour	100	250	500
Enzyme active malt flour <i>or</i> Enzyme active malt flour with Vitamin C	1	2.5	5
Extra Virgin Olive Oil	4	10	20
*Salt	1.5	3.8	7.5
**Water	50 - 60	125 - 150	250 - 300
Mature whole wheat sourdough starter	10	25	50
<i>Total</i>	<i>166.5 – 176.5</i>	<i>416.3 – 441.3</i>	<i>832.5 – 882.5</i>

**1.5 % (bakers per cent) is a low salt option. Your preference may be for the more usual 2% (baker's percent)*

*** Try smaller amount of water initially.*

[] Measure whole wheat flour and enzyme active malt with vitamin C, into mixing bowl. Mix to evenly distribute the malt.

[] Measure olive oil and add to flour in mixing bowl. Rub the olive oil into the flour using the back of a fork until evenly distributed. *Or use a food processor fitted with a metal blade, or a stand mixer fitted with a flat beater or paddle.*

[] Separately, measure salt in a jug or bowl. Measure water into the jug. Stir to dissolve the salt.

[] Measure the sourdough and add to the jug containing salt and water. Mix well and add to the flour in mixing bowl.

[] Mix well enough to completely incorporate the flour and make a fairly homogeneous dough. The dough should be quite stiff. *Machine mixing with a paddle is recommended. Extensive mixing to develop the dough is not required at this stage. If dough is too stiff to knead into a cohesive dough, add more water in 5 or 10% increments with respect to the flour. After each addition of water knead until the water is completely incorporated. For this Cottage loaf style, the dough should be stiff enough to form a self-supporting ball. Make a note of amount of water used for your particular whole wheat flour so that all the water can be added at the beginning of the recipe when next this style of bread is made with the same flour.*

[] Press dough down in a bowl or large measuring jug. Cover and leave to rise until doubled in volume. *For example, this may take 3-4 hours at 90°F (32°C), 6 hours at 77°F (25°C) or 12 hours at 68°F (20°C). Starting with warm water and warm utensils speeds the process. Waiting longer than the time for the dough to double will result in a stronger sourdough flavor*

[] Knead well on a smooth board with moist hands. Do not flour the board or add additional flour. *Alternatively, knead the risen dough briefly, for up to 5 minutes, in a mixer with a dough hook.*

[] To start the shaping for one Cottage Loaf: Form the dough-piece into a dough ball. Pinch off one third of the dough and re-form the dough-pieces into two neat balls. Make a hole in the center of each dough-piece by pushing your thumb through to the base. Cover and allow dough pieces to rest for 15 - 30 minutes.

[] After resting the dough, enlarge the hole in the center of each dough-piece to approximately 2 inches in each case. Place the dough-pieces between cloths to prevent drying out.

[] Allow the dough-pieces to rise almost to the maximum in volume, for 1-2 hours, at approximately 86°F (30°C).

[] Preheat oven for an hour or more at 450°F with baking stone in place. Introduce a steam source by inserting a loaf pan containing half an inch depth of water 15 minutes before baking is due to begin. This is left in the oven for the entire bake time.

[] Lightly flour an oven peel. Lay the larger dough piece on the peel. Using water moistened fingers or brush, moisten the top surface of the dough piece. Place the smaller ring on top.

[] Bake at 400°F for approximately 40 minutes for a loaf based on 500 grams of flour *or* 30 minutes for a loaf based on 250 grams of flour.

[] Allow loaf to cool on a rack for at least an hour before cutting into wedges around the center. Serve pre-cut but still in shape for an unusual dinner bread presentation.

