

The Fold Granary - Distinctive Grains, Distinctive Flavours!

Discovering Heritage & Population Wheat Through Sourdough

Exploring the character of heritage grains, one loaf at a time, Heritage wheats offer sourdough bakers an opportunity to explore the diversity of wheat and discover the unique characteristics that different varieties bring to the loaf.

Each wheat has its own personality, influencing the flavour, texture, water absorption and handling of the dough. Working with heritage flour can therefore be a little different from baking with modern bread flour, but with a few adjustments, it can be a wonderfully rewarding experience.

For this collection of recipes, I've been exploring four from The Fold Granary's heritage wheats: April Bearded, Flour Power, Mulika & Purple, and their population wheat, Mariagertoba. Each offers an opportunity to discover more about these grains and how they can be used in sourdough baking.

Baking with 100% Heritage & Population Wheat

For the more experienced sourdough baker, using 100% heritage wheat is a wonderful way to explore the character of an individual grain.

Without blending in modern bread flour, the heritage wheat takes centre stage. However, different wheats behave differently, and bakers may need to adapt their hydration, dough development and fermentation to suit the flour they are using.

The key is to work with the dough rather than rely entirely on timings. Observing how it develops, feels and responds throughout fermentation will help you understand what it needs to produce the best possible loaf.

Finding Your Feet with a Blend

If you're newer to sourdough baking, blending heritage flour with a suitable bread flour can be a helpful place to start.

A blend can offer a more forgiving dough that may be easier to develop, shape and handle, while still allowing the heritage wheat to contribute its distinctive character.



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Recipes Using Heritage Flour from The Fold

April Bearded

Flavour profile

April Bearded offers an opportunity to explore the character of heritage wheat in a beautifully simple sourdough loaf. Using the flour on its own allows the grain to take centre stage, without the influence of modern bread flour.

The natural character of the wheat is complemented by the gentle acidity and depth of flavour that develop during sourdough fermentation.

Patience is particularly important when working with this flour. Although the dough may initially feel firm, allowing it plenty of time to hydrate helps the flour absorb the water properly and the dough develop before fermentation and shaping.

Recipe

Yield: 1 loaf

Hydration: 70%

Salt: 2%

Starter hydration: 100%

Ingredients

500g April Bearded Flour

50g Starter (100% hydration) in warmer months (24c+)

100g Starter (100% hydration) in cooler months (based on room temperatures below 20c)

350g Water

10g Salt

Starter percentages are calculated against the flour added directly to the dough.

Method

1. Mix

Combine all the ingredients and mix thoroughly until no dry flour remains. For a single batch, everything can be mixed together at the outset.

2. Rest and hydrate

Cover the dough and leave it to rest for at least one full hour. It may benefit from a little longer. This is an important stage when working with April Bearded. Give the flour sufficient time to absorb the water before judging the dough's consistency.

3. Develop the dough

When you begin your first stretch-and-fold, assess how the dough feels. If it is still particularly tight, add a further 10 g of water and work it in gently. There is no need to add the extra water if the dough already feels pliable.

Carry out a further 3/4 sets of stretch-and-folds allowing the dough to rest for 30 minutes between each set.

Handle the dough gently, aiming to develop sufficient strength without overworking it - April Bearded requires gentler handling than commodity wholewheat flour.

5. Bulk fermentation

April Bearded tends to ferment more quickly than conventional wholemeal bread flour, so keep a close eye on the dough as it develops. Don't wait for it to double in size; by then, it may have fermented further than you want.

Use the dough's development as your guide rather than relying solely on the clock.

6. How to tell when bulk fermentation is complete

Rather than relying on the clock alone, look for a combination of signs:

- A domed surface: The top of the dough should appear gently rounded rather than flat.
- Pulling away from the sides: The dough may begin to release itself from the edges of the container.
- A noticeable wobble: When you gently move the container, the dough should have a light, aerated wobble rather than feeling dense and solid.

An increase in volume: The dough should have risen considerably and look fuller and more aerated, although it does not need to double.



7. Divide and shape

Turn the dough out onto clean work surface and shape into a boule or bâtard. There is no need to bench rest. Lightly flour the dough and invert into a banneton with the seam side up.

A note on banneton size

April Bearded dough doesn't necessarily develop the same strength and elasticity as dough made with conventional strong bread flour, so it benefits from a little extra support during its cold retard.

I use a slightly smaller banneton than you might typically choose for this dough weight: an 18cm round banneton for a boule or a 21cm oval banneton for a bâtard. The closer fit helps support the sides of the dough, encouraging it to hold a more upright shape rather than spreading outwards while it rests in the fridge.

It's a small adjustment, but one that can make a real difference to the shape of the finished loaf.

9 Scoring

Scoring means cutting the surface of your dough just before baking. These cuts give the loaf a controlled place to open as it expands in the oven - known as an expansion score.

Use a sharp bread lame or razor blade and make clean, confident cuts without pressing down on the dough.

For a boule (round loaf)

Score the top of the boule into quarters by making two cuts that cross in the centre, forming a cross. This simple pattern is easy for beginners to follow and gives the loaf a neat, attractive finish.

For a bâtard (oval loaf)

Make one straight cut across the centre of the loaf, from one side to the other. Hold the blade upright and cut confidently through the surface of the dough.

A few tips

- Score immediately before baking.
- Use a sharp blade for clean cuts.
- Make each cut in one confident movement.
- Handle the dough gently to preserve the air developed during fermentation.
- Bake until the crust is well coloured and the loaves are fully cooked. Allow them to cool completely before slicing.

10. Baking Your Loaf

Lift your dough using the baking parchment into your lidded baking vessel - a dutch oven or enamel roasting tin is perfect.

Place into your cold oven and set temperature to 230c (fan) and bake for 30 minutes with the lid.

Remove the lid and bake for a further 10-15 minutes without the lid until desired colour is achieved and the loaf sounds hollow when tapped on the bottom.

11. The Hardest Part: Waiting!

I know, I know. Your kitchen smells amazing, the crust is calling your name, and all you want to do is cut yourself a slice. But please, step away from the bread knife!

Your loaf is still working its magic as it cools. The crumb inside is setting, and the moisture is redistributing throughout the bread, helping it develop that lovely texture you've worked so hard to achieve.

Cut into it too soon and you risk a gummy, sticky crumb and squashed slices. All that patience during fermentation, and now the bread wants you to wait a little longer. Honestly!

Transfer your loaf to a wire rack and **let it cool completely** before slicing. Put the kettle on, find something else to do, or simply admire your handiwork from a safe distance.

Trust me, your bread will thank you for it. And so will your slices!



A note on the cold oven method

If you're used to preheating your oven and Dutch oven before baking sourdough, this method might seem a little controversial! However, ovens vary in how efficiently they heat up, and preheating both the oven and a heavy pot uses additional time and energy.

For this method, simply place your shaped and scored loaf into a cold Dutch oven or lidded enamel roaster, put it into the cold oven and set the temperature to 230°C. The pot and loaf heat up together as the oven comes to temperature.

I promise it works! It's a straightforward, energy-conscious approach that produces a lovely loaf without the need to spend time heating an empty oven and pot.

