

Sourdough Bread and Live Sourdough Starter Guidance

A sourdough starter is a live and fermented product, which relies on the growth of bacterial and yeast naturally present in the flour. Starters are maintained by regularly removing a portion to use in recipes and/or removing a portion before feeding the starter with flour and water. Starters can be kept for extended periods, as long as they stay alive and healthy. Therefore shelf-life date application is not relevant, and a starter only needs to be discarded if it becomes contaminated and/or is no longer active.

As the starter is an ingredient in any bread and in any other product it is used in, the components/ingredients of the starter must be included in the recipe specification and must be included in allergen information for all products the starter is used in.

To ensure the starter stays active good hygiene practices must be followed at all times, to protect it from contamination with bacteria that compete with the desired lactic acid bacteria, with mould spores or with foreign bodies.

When producing or using a sourdough starter, the following steps must be followed:

- A starter must either be produced in unit, or be acquired from a reputable source, i.e. a commercial starter acquired through a Compass Group UK&I approved supplier
- The starter must be produced and fed with only flour and potable water.
- Allergen information for the flour used throughout the process must be available, and accurately communicated to consumers in any products the starter is used in.
- Where possible seek to use the same brand of flour when feeding the starter.
- The starter must be stored in a food safe container thoroughly cleaned prior to use, with a lid, which can be loose fitting, and must be labelled with the product name, the date it was started and the initials of the person/s responsible for maintaining it.
- The starter must be stored in the fridge, in a designated location, unless it is in active use or being held at ambient after being fed, with the starter always being returned to the fridge prior to unit closure.
- Prior to feeding and/or use, the starter must be inspected for visible contamination, including mould growth, discoloration and for any off or sulfuric odour. A live starter will smell slightly acidic/sour, be visibly aerated and increase in volume at ambient temperature.
- When inspecting the starter and checking for any odours, ensure good hygiene practices are applied at all times.

- Any starter with visible contamination and/or with off or sulfuric odour, that does not grow when fed or shows any signs of not being healthy and alive, must not be added to any other starter; no attempts must be made to reactivate it and it must be discarded.
- All equipment and worksurfaces must be cleaned and sanitised before and after being used in the production of sourdough bread, or other recipes using the starter and/or for maintenance of the starter.
- Food handlers must follow good personal hygiene handling practices at all times, in particular thorough washing of hands before and after handling a starter.
- Allergen information for bread produced using a sourdough starter must include the starter ingredients, i.e. the flour used throughout its life. These starter ingredients must include any variations in starter ingredients used over the course of the starter life.
- Surplus starter may be used in approved recipes, where it is used, all ingredients used in the starter, must be included in the recipe specification and allergen information displayed to the customer.