

Rustic Country Bread or Don't be Foolish Make a Poolish (Easy Starter)!

The Poolish/Starter

1/4 cup (28 grams) whole wheat flour
1 1/4 cups (150 grams) all purpose white flour or bread flour
1/2 *teaspoon* active dry or instant yeast
1 cup (227 grams) lukewarm water

The Dough

All of the risen poolish starter
1/2-3/4 *teaspoon* active dry or instant yeast
1 tablespoon sugar
3 3/4-4 cups (450-480 grams) all purpose white flour or bread flour, a bit more to sprinkle tops of loaves
2 1/4 teaspoons salt
1 cup (227 grams) lukewarm water

Directions: Start with your poolish/starter mixing the flours and yeast right in the mixer or bread maker and adding water till a thickish mixture forms. Now let this rest, covered in the mixing bowl or bread maker container for between 2 hours to overnight but not more than 16 hours. I have done both 2 hours and overnight and there is not a huge difference in flavor, it's more subtle so up to you. The poolish should rise nicely and have little bubbles/holes in the dough (it does not rise as high as the finished dough).

Next right in the same bowl, add the dough mixture, the yeast, sugar, flour and salt and the water. Mix all together and if you have time, let sit a bit to incorporate the liquid but if not, I've carried on without. Mix till the dough is smooth, only adding the extra flour if necessary, about 10-12 minutes. Now if in bread maker, unplug. Don't let it go through a whole dough cycle it will overmix it. Now cover with lid or mixing bowl with a towel and let rise till doubled in bulk. **DO NOT PUNCH DOWN DOUGH.** This is important both because it won't get those cool holes in the finished bread product and also will take a lot longer to rise again.

Prepare one or two loaf pans depending on the size you want by greasing well or lining with parchment paper and POUR the dough evenly into the two pans. Yes it's a bit thick but it works. The leftover bits you can scrape out with your hands. Lightly brush or spritz tops of loaves with water. Sprinkle with white or whole wheat flour for that rustic look and place in warm spot to rise for about 25 minutes and while it's rising for the last time, preheat your oven to 425 F/220 C. Take a pan and fill with ice or cold water and put the loaves into the oven with the ice/water (this keeps the oven humid). Bake about 25-30 minutes or till golden brown and beautifully crusty. Let cool on wire racks and **DO NOT** cut till the bread cools or it will get gummy and what a shame. When cooled slice and enjoy.