

# Admonition # 1

*Don't rush the process. This applies to everything from getting your mother started, to rising bread, to getting your mother established enough to convert your Counter Mother to a Refrigerator mother.*

## Getting Your Mother Started

The most common concern I've encountered when it comes to getting a mother started is that it isn't active enough or that breads made with it aren't rising. Creating a wild-yeast mother is most assuredly an exercise in patience and diligence. As long as you don't try to rush the process, and care for it diligently, it will reward you with fresh-baked wild bread. The process of getting your mother started can truly take several weeks. However, once it's established, you will be able to keep it long-term with minimal maintenance.

When starting out, it's easy to get caught up in the fear of the unknown. I know when I started, I was very concerned that my mother was going to spoil. Before we figured out how to streamline the process and we shifted from once daily feedings to twice daily feedings, there were times when it did mold. This usually happened around day 4 or 5, soon after the mother began to show signs of fermentation. This issue was eradicated through the use of the high-quality flours featured in our book and twice daily feedings. When starting out, the consistency of your mother and the rate at which it ferments will vary depending on the type of flour used and the conditions in your home. Here is a general rundown of what you can expect to see during the process:

### Week 1

Days 1–2: Your mother will be a thick paste. It won't do much between feedings.

Days 3–5: You will start to see definite signs of fermentation during these days. The consistency of your mother will “loosen” and become easier to stir (please note that this change will be less marked in gluten-free flours). Your mother will also begin to have bubbles, and you may notice a faint sour smell.

Days 6–7: Your mother should be bubbly, and the sour smell will be more prominent. The volume of your mother is also growing, and as a result, you may see a layer of liquid on the top at feedings. This is normal and a result of the mother settling between feedings—just stir it back in.

By Bake Day of Week 1, your mother will be alive and active, but likely not up to the task of rising loaves of Batter Bread (p. 32) just yet. There are exceptions to this, but as a general rule, plan on making a batch of pancakes, waffles, or another recipe from Section 3, Quick & Easy Sourdough–Enhanced Treats pp. 172–189.

### Week 2

During Week 2, your mother will continue to ferment and pull in wild yeasts from the air. During this week, expect to see more bubbling. Also, your mother should continue to smell pleasantly sour. Toward the end of the week, as the volume of your mother continues to grow, you may still see the layer of liquid on top of your mother at feedings, which is still normal, and you will continue to see this each week as the volume of your mother grows.

If your mother has vigorous bubbles and a prominent sour smell, you should be able to bake Batter Bread on Bake Day. If you are unsure about your mother's readiness to give rise to bread, wait another week and use your mother for recipes in Section 3, Quick & Easy Sourdough–Enhanced Treats pp. 172–189.

### Week 3

By week 3, your mother should be bubbly, active, and have a pleasant, distinguished sour smell. If your mother meets all of these criteria, chances are that she will be ready for batter breads on Bake Day.

## Week 4

By the end of week 4, your mother should be established and up to the task of baking Batter Breads. Expect the rise to take 6–8 hours if kept between 70–73°F. After your mother is established and reliably giving rise to Beginner Breads, you can continue to maintain a Counter Mother for as long as you wish.

## Closing thoughts . . .

This is a general rundown of what you can expect to see when getting your mother established. Due to the variety of flours suggested in the book and the wide array of variables in different environments, it is in no way comprehensive.

The time it takes to establish a mother is dependent upon its environment. You can help ensure success by using purified water and the flours we recommend, keeping your mother warm (ideally between 70–73°F), being consistent with feeding times, keeping harsh chemicals away from your mother, and keeping the towel that covers your mother fresh and clean.

## Rising Bread

As a person who baked frequently before I began baking with a wild-yeast mother, it is my opinion that the biggest adjustment to wild-bread baking is the way that the breads rise.

I love seeing the visible progression of breads rising. One of my favorite things to do when making breads with store-bought yeast is to mix up the dough, and then snugly cover the bowl with plastic wrap and watch an air bubble form under the plastic wrap as the dough off-gasses. Once the dough has finished rising, I am rewarded with a satisfying \*pop\* when I lift the plastic wrap away. With traditional yeast, all of this happens in less than two hours.

In contrast to the seemingly explosive rise of breads made with packaged yeast, breads made with a wild-yeast mother rise in a slow, steady progression. Once I became accustomed to the way wild breads rise, I came to realize that there is an even greater reward in the process than peeling away a bit of plastic wrap from a bowl and listening to it pop: The incredibly satisfying feeling of accomplishment rooted in the knowledge that I started with a bowl of flour and water, nurtured it, encouraged it to grow, and then turned it into something absolutely delicious and intoxicatingly aromatic.

Wild bread is a *s-l-o-w* food. In the beginning, you spend several weeks cultivating a mother, and when your mother is active and ready, the rise is slow and steady, typically taking 6–8 hours. As your mother grows and the wild yeast concentration is higher, the rise times shorten, but the rise is always a steady progression.

Different flours are going to rise differently. Some flours naturally loft more than others. You can expect tender, fluffy loaves from white and einkorn-wheat flours. Sprouted wheat, Einkorn, and quinoa flours will produce hearty yet lofty loaves. Kamut whole wheat, white rice, and brown-rice flours will all produce a bread that lofts well but is denser than breads made using the other flours.

## Converting Your Counter Mother to a Refrigerator Mother

Once you have a handle on your Counter Mother and are thinking about moving on to the Advanced Section, there are a couple considerations to make. On p. 58, a readiness test is recommended before converting your Counter Mother to a Refrigerator Mother. This test offers a visual opportunity to see if your mother is able to double in volume. However, if your Counter Mother fails to double in volume during the readiness test but is reliably giving loft to Beginner Breads with good flavor, then it's ready to convert to a Refrigerator Mother.

Once you have a Refrigerator Mother, you'll only need to feed it once per week. At each weekly feeding, you may notice a layer of liquid on the top. This is normal and the result of your mother settling throughout the week. You may also notice some surface discoloration. This is most common when you are using einkorn, Einkorn, and sprouted wheat flours, but can occur in any of the flours. It is not a cause for concern—just stir it back in. Mold shouldn't occur as long as you keep up on weekly feedings. Be sure to clean out your Pyrex loaf pan periodically.

If you want to bake more than once per week using your Refrigerator Mother, keep in mind that you always need to put back what you take out. For example, if you wish to bake twice per week, start with 1 cup of mother in your Pyrex loaf pan and feed your mother 3/4 cup flour and 1/2 cup water each week. This will allow you to remove 1 cup of mother each week.

If you wish to take a break from Bake Day, refer to the final paragraph on p. 59 for more information.