

A Dean's Covid-19 Cookbook

(mostly meatless, with liner notes)

Episode One

Yeah, so the first thing I did, like everyone else, was start a starter. I've been making my own bread for years, usually succumbing to the bug (I know, I know) as the weather starts changing in the late fall. So when I bought one of the last 10kilo bags of flour at Sav-On—this would have been back in the second week of March of so—I did indeed protest too much to the superhumanly patient clerk at the till that making bread was nothing new for me. Strangely, the clerk did not appear to care.

There are, at last count, about 900,000 starter recipes online. The irony of all the DIY breadmaking, in the context of concerns about food scarcity and supply-chain collapse, is that making and maintaining your own levains is really incredibly wasteful. Every day's levain feeding means dumping about half of what you start with—sure, [there are things to do with your excess starter](#), the most popular being “freeze it until you're ready to throw it away when nobody is looking”. The satisfaction of making one's own bread is more primal, its meaning more elusive, than the sanctimonious homiletics of the artisanal-industrial food complex would have it. But I digress.

I make boules (one every 2 days or so) out of Ken Forkish's [Flour, Water, Salt, Yeast](#) (2012). I think Portland, OR has some different climate chemistry for breadmaking; I find his levain recipes mix up a really wet and sticky dough, but after a couple of fails I got one that I liked. Forkish also has a great personal story – basically, he gave up a successful suited career in middle management and became an artisan baker at midlife. There may be hope for me yet, in other words, not least because a bag of flour is still cheaper than a Porsche.

I've made more than boules with that starter, which now doubles in size after ½ cup of flour feeding, in under 2 hours. Sourdough starter pizza dough was a great foundation to a basic tomato sauce, caramelized onion, and cheese pie, as well as a sliced pear, more caramelized onions, and blue cheese “dessert” pizza. I threw a handful of arugula on top of each and a glug of good olive oil, so didn't have to bother with the boring green salad, which I hate making almost as much as I hate eating. Seriously people, the experience of making and eating that boring green salad has to be the culinary equivalent of marking the 37th final exam essay...

The heels and the fails of the boules make excellent croutons, but what will really blow you away is if you make [Zuni Café's Bread Salad and Roast Chicken](#), the master work of the late Judy Rodgers, using the abovementioned arugula, with or without the chicken. We've had that about 1000 times since March 15.

“Sourdough” pancakes – you’ll never have to waste $\frac{3}{4}$ of the buttermilk quart again after these. Just add some (or a lot) of starter to your basic pancake mix-up, go light on your baking soda/powder, and let it sit for a bit longer than you normally would before frying it up. I actually make blini, the crepe-like Russian breakfast treat I fell in love with when I was there last year. For years now I’ve also made a simple blueberry compote to accompany any version of the pancake/blini: take 1 cup of blueberries; a tablespoon of water; the peel of one lemon; a glug of maple syrup; 1 cinnamon stick; pinch of salt; simmer for about 20-25 minutes or so.

Another breakfast option we’ve been exercising during Covid: homemade granola (cheaper and less sugary than your average store-bought) with “home-brewed” fruit yogurt. I like Gabrielle Hamilton’s recipe for granola in her [Prune cookbook](#), but I’m pretty much just making it up with whatever is in the pantry at this point. For the yogurt, run about 1-2 cups of defrosted frozen fruit through a food mill or blender (strain out the seeds if you can); add to 1 container of plain yogurt with a glop of honey or maple syrup. You’ll never buy that over-sugared yogoidal rubbish again.

Some of you may have seen the Apple Fritter triumph on Instagram (my first such post in about 10 years or so). That will be the topic of Episode two, because, obviously, one cannot say enough about apple fritters.