Scale vs Cups When Feeding a Sourdough Starter

Why a Scale Is Better

The most effective way to feed a sourdough starter is by using a scale. Below are the principal considerations:

The Importance of Weight: Accurate measurement of flour and water by weight is essential for ensuring the correct consistency. A scale enables precise addition of equal parts flour and water, thereby supporting the ideal environment for your sourdough starter's growth.

- **Precision in Hydration** Sourdough starters thrive on consistent hydration. A common feeding ratio is 1:1:1 (starter: water: flour by weight).
    - 100g starter + 100g water + 100g flour = perfect balance
    - One cup of flour does not weigh the same as one cup of water, as water has a higher density. Therefore, measuring by volume may affect the accuracy of ingredient ratios.

Limitations of Measuring by Volume: Relying on cups to measure flour can introduce significant inaccuracies. The weight of a cup of flour may range from 90 to 150 grams depending on several factors such as compaction, air content, and type of flour.

- **Flour Measurement Variability** A cup of flour can weigh anywhere from 90g to 150g depending on:
    - How it's scooped (packed vs fluffed)
    - Type of flour (whole wheat is heavier than white)
    - Humidity and storage conditions This inconsistency can lead to underfeeding or overhydration.
- **Better Starter Health** Feeding by weight ensures your starter gets the right amount of “food” (flour). Underfed starters can smell sour or acetone-like and struggle to rise.

Consistency: Employing a scale guarantees consistent measurements, which is critical to sustaining the health and vitality of your sourdough starter. This method helps prevent overhydration or inadequate feeding, both of which can negatively impact bread quality.

Cost-Effectiveness: Investing in a kitchen scale streamlines the baking process, minimizes errors, and enhances overall efficiency.

It is important to note that different flours, as well as sourdough starters and water, each have unique weights. Additionally, the properties of various flour types affect their densities.

What If You Do Not Have a Scale?

You can still feed your starter by volume, but it is trickier:

- Use approximately twice as much flour as water by volume (e.g., ½ cup flour to ¼ cup water) to approximate a 1:1 weight ratio.
- Watch for consistency: it should be like thick pancake batter—not soupy or dry.
- Consider investing in a kitchen scale (many cost under $20) for more reliable results.