

Bread Baking and Yeast

Electronic mail from Dr. Shirley Fischer Arends, Washington, D.C., native of Ashley, North Dakota. Dr. Arends is author of the book, *The Central Dakota Germans: Their History, Language and Culture*.

Everlasting Yeast. The Dakota pioneers made this with dry cubes of yeast. In the evening they cooked 2 medium size potatoes (diced) in 1 quart of water for half an hour or until very soft. The potatoes were mashed in the same cooking liquid. To this liquid in which the potatoes were mashed were added 2 tablespoons of sugar and 1 tablespoon of salt. This mixture was left in the kettle in which the potatoes had been cooked, was covered and put in a warm place. Before going to bed, the 2 dry yeast cubes were added, after which another quart of warm water could be added. The kettle was wrapped in a warm blanket and set next to the cook stove. It had to be kept warm.

In the morning, 1 pint was taken out, put in a sealed jar and placed in the cellar. Dough was made with the rest of the yeast.

The reserved pint of yeast was then used the next time, along with the potatoes mixture replacing the yeast cubes. Thus the step of adding yeast cubes and water were eliminated. From the new mixture another pint was saved for the next time. The pint had to be used within a week or it would get too old and would not rise. One pint plus the potato mixture was enough to make 4 loaves of bread.

When the cook ran out of the everlasting yeast, instead of starting a new batch, she would borrow a pint from a neighbor. For the more the yeast was used and renewed, the better it was.

It is no longer possible to make the original everlasting yeast today, because the dry yeast cubes used then, are no longer available.

Electronic mail from Sylvia Hertel, Albert Lea, Minnesota, 16 March 2017

My mother came directly from Germany, and she used nothing but cake yeast. It would last in the refrigerator for ages, but in our house, it never had that opportunity - it did last for months though, when she bought more than one cake at a time (1 cake lasted us about 2 months). You just cut off what you need, re-wrap it and put it back in the refrigerator.

We baked 15-17 loaves of bread every Saturday (5 kids), and if we had company coming during the week (family dinner), we baked more. I don't know if you can find cake yeast anymore, but it's a live yeast. This is why it kept so long when kept in the proper temperature. Dry yeast keeps a long time, too. Mom didn't know how to use anything else. She tried dry yeast one time, and was so disappointed with the results that she never tried it

again. I think you have to know the tricks in using it. I remember having a flop or two with the dry yeast, too, before I figured it out.

Electronic mail from Kathy Ward, 16 March 2017

I have made natural, no commercial yeast starters, like our forbears and they are easy to do. They are 'everlasting' as long as you feed them regularly. They also freeze well once started. My son started a new one up at our cabin in the mountains where there is no pollution.

Just google: all natural yeast starter or no commercial yeast starter.

They are all the same, mixing flour (best to use one like King Arthur unbleached, unbromated) and non chlorinated water, and 'feeding' the mixture with more of the same flour.

Here's a simple link--<http://allrecipes.com/recipe/17513/no-commercial-yeast-starter/>

I store mine in the fridge, like a sourdough starter, and feed it once a week.

You can figure out what is best in your area with your altitude, humidity etc by trial and error. My oldest son moved out of the country for a year, and he put part of his starter in the freezer to save it for when he returns.

I also made another kind of yeast starter from my own grapes in the garden. They need to be fresh, organic, not washed, as the natural yeasts in the air cling to the grapes, and you soak these. You can google that method as well. Good luck.

Electronic mail from Connie Dahlke, Walla Walla, Washington, 15 March 2017

I'm afraid I do not know a source of yeast starter that is connected to Germans from Russia heritage. By the time I came on the scene (1950s and 1960s) my Germans-from-Russia Grandmother was using packets of Fleishmann's dry granular yeast for her bread. My mother did the same.

When my grandparents lost their farm in North Dakota during the depression, they were only able to take with them what they could pack into their car. I'm sure a yeast starter was not among the things that they packed. They then moved to Oregon for a few years, then to California for a few years, then to Oregon in various places. They eventually settled on a farm in Scappoose, Oregon (north of Portland) in 1953. Such was the disruption that many North Dakota families suffered as a result of the "dirty thirties."

Today's bread starters are generally made with commercial active yeast to get them started, as modern flour-milling generates enough heat during that process to kill off any wild yeast that might have been in the harvested wheat.

Electronic mail from Sam Brungardt, St. Paul, Minnesota, 16 March 2017

I have never baked with everlasting yeast (*ewiger Zaatz*) from North or South Dakota. However, I have baked with homemade sourdough *Backwasser* starter from Ellis County, Kansas. In fact, after my source of a many-years-old starter died, I fell back on the instructions of the recently deceased Volga German woman who regularly used and maintained it. She told me that I could make my own (as she confessed she did) should my starter die and I did not know someone who could give me a start of theirs.

She said she'd done this and it was very easy. Her instructions were to mix a cup of unbleached general purpose flour with a cup and a half of water in an earthenware bowl and to set the slurry in a warm place in the kitchen, uncovered, for a day. After that, cover the bowl with a clean tea towel to keep fruit flies, which are attracted to the alcohol produced by the fermenting mixture, out of the starter. Keep feeding the starter for a couple of days, mixing in more flour and water, until the yeast and bacteria from the air have turned the young starter into one that bubbles vigorously shortly after being "fed".

The one time that I lost my starter from not baking with it often enough, I made a new one the next time I was visiting relatives in Kansas during the summer. I still have and use this starter. It works perfectly well and makes bread that tastes the same as the starter bread my Aunt Mary nee Kuhn baked every week for my Uncle Leo Brungardt, who refused to eat store-bought bread.

More detailed instructions for using and maintaining such a starter are in the [Sei Unser Gast](#) (*Be Our Guest*) cookbook, which I edited and wrote many Volga German recipes and remembrances for. My instructions and recipes for Homemade Starter Bread are on pp 117-118 of the cookbook. .

Electronic mail from Marvin C. Hoffer, Lewistown, Montana, 17 March 2017

Found the information on the BLK-SEA@LISTSERV.NODAK.EDU website of interest even though most of my "bread making-baking" has been limited to my pack-horse wilderness work, etc. over the past decades. The term "everlasting yeast" has an almost religious ring to it, and no doubt our German GroSeMutter, Mutters, and allied family on the Great Steppe of the Dakotas held it in similar esteem for mighty good reasons. Without it, there would be nothing to eat but "flat bread."

The two articles were very informative, but I didn't spot specific information as to "from whence cometh the yeast ?" except Shirley Arends states: " Everlasting Yeast. The Dakota pioneers made this with dry cubes of yeast. Kathy Ward added this to the wild yeast digest: "I also made another kind of yeast starter from my own grapes in the garden. They need to be fresh, organic, not washed, as the natural yeasts in the air cling to the grapes" although she does not state from where the yeast came from she uses for bread making yeast, except to refer to google.

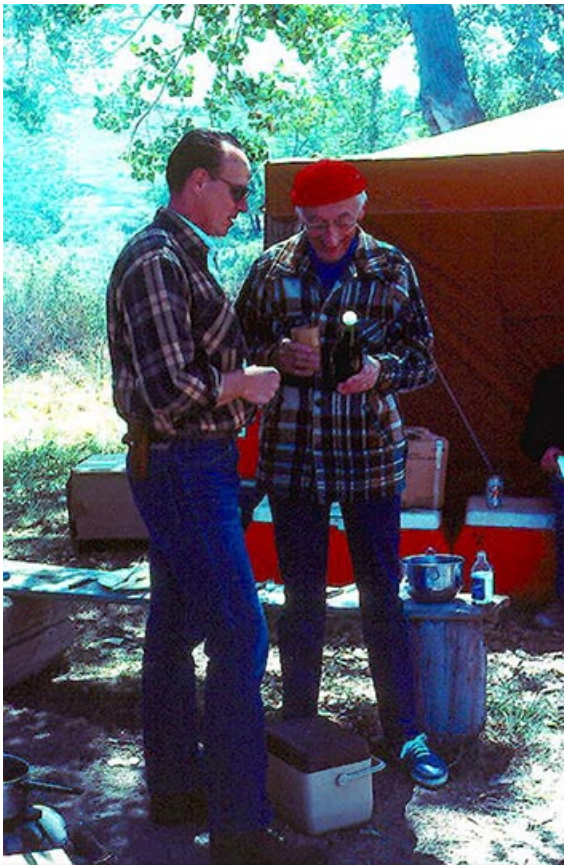
Both ladies are "on the right track" as to the source of yeast that is the genesis of all the grain flour baking and the critical "dough raising" which without would restrict us to flat breads, flat cakes, flat donuts, etc.

For no specific reason except to "throw my two bits into the ring" re: yeast source, I have these data based on my decades of limited breads making and baking, and, the fine art of making wine on the Great Plains of wild chokecherry, wild buffalo berry, wild grapes, wild plum, etc.

As many Germans From Russia heritage folks know that on the Great Plains we made wine “the Olde Way” as was done in what became Germany, Olde South Russia, and many other places in the world. The process was simple. Gather the fruit when ripe, wash gently to get rid of miscellaneous debris, bird dropping, etc. Put in a large crock (not metal) of 5-30 gallons, add adequate sugar, water to cover the berries, cover crock with a clean dish towel or other cloth.....then, set back and let Mutter Nature do the rest. Kept at warm temp (eg. 70-80 F) for about three weeks and it started to bubble. Magic ? No. Our world is loaded with wild yeast of thousands of species that cover everything and everywhere we live, including the air we breath. As you, the reader knows, most foods left “out” will “rot,” some start rotting in hours, some rot for years.....fine cheeses....which we like. So it is with our homemade wines. The wild yeast easily drops through the protective cloth (only keeps flies, mice and Kinder out) into the warm buffalo berries, sugar and water solution in the crock.

We never used any “commercial” yeast to make some of the best wild berries wine, better than any you can buy at a Costco store today. Didn’t need to. It was there in the air for the “taking.” In due time I filtered the bubbling mash through clean cloths a few times, and put it back into the crock. Added some more sugar to keep the wild yeast happy as they burned it in their helpful bodies into alcohol. Wild yeast never yielded more than 10-12% alcohol by volume, which all connoisseurs of fine wines know is generally referred to as a “sweet wine.” I did not know of any Germans From Russia during the 1930-90s on the Great Plains who started sipping fine wines that liked the “very dry” commercial wines of 12 plus % alcohol by vol. No, “If you are going to serve a good wine to a gathering of Germans From Russia from the Olde Country (Great Plains) it better be a sweet wine, homemade,”

or possibly a sweet commercial wine like Mogan David... who avowedly was of German from Russia heritage, according to some genealogists.



No brag intended, just fact. In my professional career I worked and lived in much of the US, which put me in western Montana back in the 1980s. Jacques Cousteau, his son Jean-Michel and large crew were filming the large rivers of the world. They finished the Amazon, and his crew then came to film the Missouri starting at the Three Forks in western Montana. They came to my area in north-central Montana June, 1985 where son Jean-Michel was so impressed with the Wild Missouri River Breaks Country that he called his Dad in France, told him “git over here, ya gotta see this.” Jacques obliged by flying on a Concord to NY, then to Billings, where son Jean-Michel picked him up in their small seaplane. Yes, seaplane... no air strips in the wild country I worked in, river landing only. All the Cousteau Society staff were French, and they all spoke French except one person from U. Calif. Part of my responsibility was to meet with the Society on federal grounds, so I spent a great time with the crew, and had very informative and enjoyable discussions with Jacques. He was a gentleman, easy to converse with, he was definitely impressed with our public wilderness, and his staff treated him great respect. Fitting.

I had brewed a fine crock of wild North Dakota chokecherry wine in Dickinson before transferring to Montana back in 1980. I took a bottle of that sweet wine along to the Cousteau Society. Got to talking with Jacques about wines... they drank only Bollo wine...and presented my bottle of wild berry wine fermented with wild, airborne N.D. yeast. Had my unique label on it, and he was very impressed. Never did know if he drank some of it, all of it, or he threw it into the Wild Missouri River where it rests.."getting better with age." Photo below.

So, in a long, roundabout way, the many wild yeasts of our olde world serve more than one purpose... bread making, and wild berry wine making. Give both a try, then thank those Wild Yeast drifting around our world.