

Everlasting Yeast

Electronic mail from Daniel Flyger, Freeman, South Dakota, March 2017

This recipe for yeast is the way yeast or “everlasting yeast” as some folks call it was made 150 years ago. It’s how my wife’s grandmother, Veda, Mrs. Louis King made it. The Kings changed their name during WWI but the family name was Koenig and they were from the village of Worms.

This yeast needs hops in order to make it and that is why they always had a hop vine on old farms years ago. You pick the hop pods just as they are producing pollen. These hops should then be spread out and dried, and then stored in a cloth sack like the old flour sacks so the air can circulate.

When you make the yeast or “sponge” as old timers called it you take a handful of hops and put the in half a gallon of water you had boiled potatoes in and bring to a low boil for about an hour. Strain the pods out of the water and to this hot liquid add a pound (pint) of flour and a t of salt and a T sugar. Slowly mix it and it will form a smoothe paste. You set this aside in a warm place to rise.

Once it has risen which you’ll just have to judge. It may take a few days, then, you can keep it in a covered jar down cellar or nowadays in the fridge.

When you want to use it, take it out several hours before you plan to use it so the jar can warm to room temp. You take out however much “sponge” you need to make your recipe. Always make sure you leave at least a third of the sponge in the jar. However, much starter you took out of the jar to cook with, you need to replace that much by mixing together lukewarm water, to which you’ve added flour and stirred so it looks like the paste you started with. To this add a pinch of sugar and replace in the jar with the regular starter. Stir this all together. Let sit out for an hour or so and then cap it and return to the cool place. Doing this, you can keep the starter going “forever” as long as it doesn’t sour and smell putrid. If it doesn’t have a horrible smell, it’s still good.

The hops have the ability to kill bad yeasts that are in the air but not the good yeasts. That’s why they use hops in the brewing industry. There are many yeasts in the air and without the hops you may get bad yeasts instead of good ones. That’s why the hops were used. In this modern day and age in order to make sure your yeasts are for sure the good kind, when you first make your starter and it has cooled to lukewarm when your adding your sugar stir in a few T of store-bought yeast. This will speed up the process and you won’t have to wait for the starter to pick up natural yeasts from the air.

In interviewing older people at SoDak Stamm we heard from some that in the olden days, if someone was planning to bake in the morning and the house was going to get cold enough to freeze overnight, they’d take their starter jug to bed with them to keep it warm.