Making your own barm 2008

Introduction

A simple fresh barm can be made using organic wheat grain. Approximately half of the grain is ground to whole grain flour and the rest is in the form of fresh wheat sprouts ground to a dough texture in a food processor. The barm is started, by mixing the flour and fresh sprouts, with enough water to make a batter texture. The microorganisms are inherent on the wheat or come from the air and they are fed as a result of the enzyme actions from the whole and sprouted wheat. The presence of a small amount of salt (plain sea salt without additives), will enhance the natural selection of good tasting bread microorganisms.
The presence of salt makes the process comparable with the production of sauerkraut and naturally fermented cucumbers. However, it is usually possible to produce a good barm without using salt.
It takes approximately 2 weeks for the yeasts and lactic bacteria to multiply sufficiently in the new barm, to leaven and acidify bread.

Colored pH (acidity) testing paper, ranging from pH 3 to 5.5, or a pH meter, is useful when making and maintaining a barm. The dyes used in pH (acidity) testing are not edible, and may be poisonous, therefore when using pH paper it is always necessary to test a portion of dough that has been taken out of the main batch, on a spoon or other suitable implement, and which is afterwards discarded.

Initiating the barm

Whole wheat flour (organic)	*125 grams*
Wheat sprouts (organic, ground to a dough)	*205 grams*
Salt (optional)	*3.5 grams*
Water	*230 grams*
Approximate total	*560 grams*

If salt is used it should be completely dissolved in the given amount of water, before mixing the barm. In a small bowl, that will be no more than one third filled initially, mix whole wheat flour, wheat sprouts and water to a thick batter. Cover the bowl with a plate and leave at normal room temperature, preferably 20-25°C.

Make note of date and time, temperature, initial pH, aroma, and extent of gassing.
Stir the mixture at 8-12 hour intervals and note any changes in temperature, pH, aroma and extent of gassing.
Expected observations during the first 2-3 days might be the development of a strong grassy aroma, and plenty of gassing. However, until the pH falls to 3.5 - 4 the microorganisms present will not be suitable for breadmaking. Therefore the barm should not be given the first refreshment until the pH falls to 3.5 - 4. This low pH shows that the lactic bacteria are multiplying well.

Refreshment of new barm

Unless you would like to make a large quantity, only part of the new barm should be refreshed.

New barm at pH 3.5 - 4	*280 grams*
Whole wheat flour (organic)	*125 grams*
Salt (optional)	*3.5 grams*
Water	*156 grams*
Approximate total	*560 grams*

Continue to keep the barm in a covered bowl at 20-30°C, stir at 8-12 hour intervals and continue with observations. Refresh again whenever the pH falls to 3.5 – 4, using the same proportions or amounts of flour and water given. The sprouts will gradually be diluted but there should still be enough enzyme activity supplied to the barm.

The time taken for the barm pH to fall to 3.5 – 4, after refreshment, should be 12 hours, under these conditions. In general a new barm achieves this after 1-2 weeks, and it can then be used to make bread and for continued refreshment. Other favorable observations seen in a healthy barm should be good gassing power and a mild and pleasant aroma, perhaps fruity or buttery.