



Cheese and Chile Master Loaf

Cheese and bread is such a classic combination, and brings this loaf alive with flavor as well as the joy of melted cheese. I have added a chile fix, too, which can be as mild or strong as you choose. I use Aleppo chile flakes, which are a medium heat; see Top Tips for other suggestions. I would recommend using a cheese with a strong flavor or a combination of your favorite cheeses, cutting it into small cubes. This ensures that the flavor does not get lost in the loaf. I love to use sharp Cheddar cheese in my loaves, which is what I used in the loaf in the photo.

50 g (¼ cup) active starter

350 g (1½ cups) water

500 g (4 cups) strong white bread flour, plus more for dusting

7 g (1 tbsp) Aleppo chile flakes, or spice blend of your choice (see headnote and Top Tips)

7 g (1 tsp) salt, or to taste

200 g (1¼ cups) strong hard cheese, cut into small cubes (see Top Tips)

Rice flour, for dusting

PREP: Feed your starter to generate the 50 grams (¼ cup) of active starter needed for the recipe. Prepare an 11-inch (28-cm)-long oval banneton with rice flour and set aside a baking pan, at least 12 inches (30 cm) long with a lid, plus parchment paper.

Makes 1 standard loaf

Step 1: In the early evening, in a large mixing bowl, roughly mix together all the ingredients, except the cheese and rice flour, until you have a shaggy rough dough. Cover the bowl with a clean shower cap or your choice of cover and leave the bowl on the counter for 1 hour.

Step 2: After an hour or so, perform the first set of pulls and folds until the dough feels less sticky and comes together into a soft, pink and red speckled ball. Cover the bowl again and leave it on your counter.

Step 3: Over the next few hours, do three more sets of pulls and folds on dough, covering the dough after each set. Perform the final set before going to bed.

Step 4: Leave the covered bowl on the counter overnight, typically 8 to 10 hours, at 64 to 68°F (18 to 20°C).

Step 5: In the morning, the dough will have grown to double in size, with a smooth surface. Sprinkle flour over your kitchen counter and lay the pan liner open alongside the dough. Using a bowl scraper or your hands, gently ease the risen dough from the bowl onto the counter. Use your fingertips to start stretching and pushing out the dough, until it becomes an 8 x 15¾-inch (20 x 40-cm) rectangle with an even thickness all over. The dough will want to pull back as you stretch it; continue to pull it gently, being careful not to make holes in the dough.

Sprinkle the cubed cheese evenly over the stretched dough. Roll up the dough from one of the shorter edges toward the other to make an even

(continued)

Cheese and Chile Master Loaf (Continued)

roll of dough. Lift the sausage of dough and place it, smooth side down, in your prepared banneton, sprinkling extra rice flour down the sides and across the top, cover with the same shower cap and place in the fridge for at least 3 hours, maximum 24 hours.

Step 6: When you are ready to bake, decide whether you would like to bake in a preheated oven or from a cold start. If preheating, set the oven to 425°F (220°C) convection or 450°F (230°C) conventional.

Remove the cover from the banneton, then place the paper over the top of the banneton and the pan upside down over the top of them both. With one hand under the banneton and one on the pan, turn it all over together to turn the dough out of the banneton and into the pan. Score the dough; you will be able to see and feel cubes of cheese poking through.

If you preheated the oven, put the lid on and bake for 50 minutes. If using a cold start, place the covered pan of dough in the oven, set the temperature as above and set a timer for 55 minutes.

After the baking time for either option, remove the covered pan from the oven. Open the lid to check the loaf. Baking in a lidded pan produces a golden loaf. When you take the lid off, if you feel that your loaf is looking pale, place it back in the hot oven, in its pan, minus the lid, for 5 to 10 minutes to brown the loaf to the color of your choice.

Step 7: Once baked, carefully remove the loaf from the pan, saving the parchment paper for next time, and allow the baked loaf to cool on a wire rack for at least an hour before slicing.

Top Tips:

If you make this loaf as written, the heat will be a mild warmth. Increase it by doubling the amount of chile flakes, or by using a stronger form of chile flakes or powder, or replace the chile flakes with a piri piri or Cajun spice blend for a different flavor.

This will produce a cheese-packed loaf; if you would prefer less, use half or three-quarters of the amount of cheese. Use two different colored cheeses to create a truly inviting-looking loaf.