A BAKE-KEEPER FREE PRINTABLE

Starter Troubleshooting Quicksheet

Scan for what you're seeing right now, then follow across. ***I highly recommend keeping your starter in the fridge and feeding a portion of it as needed to bake.***

SYMPTOM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Liquid (hooch) on top	Starter is hungry - it's run out of food	Pour off or stir in for extra tang, then feed right away
No rise after feeding	Too cold, too little starter carried over, or exhausted flour	Move somewhere warmer (75-80°F); feed with a touch more starter next time
Fuzzy or colored mold	Contamination - usually pink, orange, black, or fuzzy green/white	Discard the whole jar and start fresh - don't try to save it
Grey/white haze that stirs back in	Just surface yeast & bacteria activity, not mold	Stir it back in and feed as usual
Sharp nail-polish / acetone smell	Very hungry, producing excess alcohol	Stir in a couple of spoons of flour. Feed when prepping to bake
Sluggish, slower each feeding	Kitchen too cold, or flour ratio too lean	Find a warmer spot, or feed 1:1:1 for a few cycles
Rises then collapses before you check it	You caught it past peak	Feed on a schedule that catches it 1-2 hrs earlier
Bubbly but volume doesn't increase	Weak gluten-forming flour, or a young starter	Give it another week; try a spoon of whole wheat or rye
Very runny / soupy	Ratio too heavy on water; hungry starter	Reduce water slightly, or use a stiffer ratio (1:5:5) or (1:10:10)
Very stiff, hard to stir	Ratio too heavy on flour, or very absorbent flour	Add a splash more water next feeding

Still stuck? See the full Sourdough Troubleshooting guide and Sourdough Science pages on thebakekeeper.com.