

# Dry yeast flew off shelves during coronavirus pantry stocking. Here's when you can buy it again

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## Dry yeast flew off shelves during coronavirus pantry stocking. Here's when you can buy it again

Why is there a yeast shortage? Call it the great American bake-off. From pizza to sourdough, the COVID-19 pandemic has turned Americans into bakers.

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[Jessica Guynn and Kelly Tyko](#), USA TODAY Published 2:49 p.m. ET April 23, 2020 | Updated 1:45 p.m. ET April 30, 2020

Amanda Stevens has just pulled hot bagels out of the oven in her Berkeley home. A culinary school graduate and caterer who was recently laid off, Stevens, 30, reinvented herself as a baker after California's COVID-19 shelter-in-place order.

There was only one problem with her plan: the nationwide shortage of active dry yeast. “It’s hard to sell brioche with no yeast,” Stevens says.

For more than two weeks she scavenged local stores for active dry yeast in jars and packets, even by the pound, with no luck. So Stevens turned to neighbors and friends.

Soon, slim three-packet strips started turning up on her front porch and in her mailbox. And a local German restaurant had some extra on hand. Now Stevens is popping out dinner rolls, hamburger buns, sandwich breads and sticky buns she's selling through Instagram.

Whether kneading dough to let off steam or to make homemade pizza for kids home from school, America is baking its heart out during the COVID-19 pandemic – or at least stockpiling key ingredients, causing deep shortages of pantry staples that rival the absence of toilet paper, disinfectant cleaners, baby formula and meat

Supplies of flour and eggs have been strained during stay-at-home orders. And some best-selling bread-making machines have sold out. Now dry yeast, usually stocked in a variety of inconspicuous packages and jars in the baking aisle next to flour, sugar and baking powder, has become one of the hardest ingredients for home bakers to find. For the four-week period ending April 11, yeast sales jumped 410% year over year, according to market research firm Nielsen.

## **Yeast manufacturers report unprecedented demand**

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John Heilman, vice president of yeast manufacturing for AB Mauri, makers of Fleischmann’s Yeast, oversees production at three plants in North America, one in Memphis and two in Canada. He says the yeast industry is rising to the challenge of the demand, the likes of which Heilman has never seen.

The yeast shortage began with shoppers panic-buying at the start of the pandemic. Stay-at-home orders sparked a run on supplies so massive that the two to three weeks of dry yeast buffer inventory Fleischmann’s had on hand “was gone almost instantly,” Heilman told USA TODAY.

Fleischmann’s has no shortage of raw materials needed to make yeast. The company is hiring and training new workers, dusting off unused equipment and ramping up production. And it’s replenishing low supplies of paper packets and jars.

“We are not leaving any stone unturned to put the supply back into the pipeline,” Heilman says. Still, he estimates it will take one to two months, give or take, to get store shelves stocked again.



A 18-wheeler is loaded with 48,000 lbs., of yeast is loaded into a in 24-ton tanker load at AB Mauri Fleischmann's yeast plant in Memphis, Tenn., on Thursday, April 2, 2020. Ariel Cobbert/ The Commercial Appeal



A worker inside the AB Mauri Fleischmann's yeast manufacturing plant moves packages of yeast in Memphis, Tenn., on Thursday, April 2, 2020. Ariel Cobbert/ The Commercial Appeal



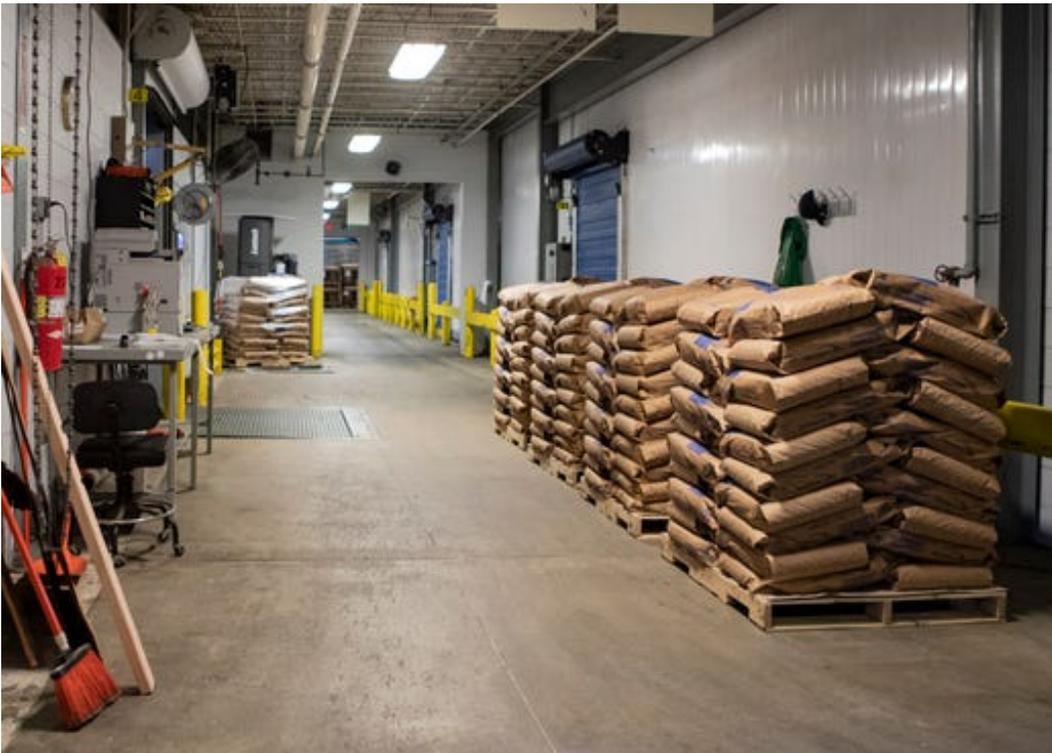
A 18-wheeler is loaded with 48,000 lbs. of yeast is loaded into a 24-ton tanker load at AB Mauri's Fleischmann's Yeast plant in Memphis, Tenn., on Thursday, April 2, 2020. Ariel Cobbert/The Commercial Appeal



A worker at the Fleischmann's Yeast manufacturing plant moves packages of yeast in Memphis on Thursday, April 2, 2020. Ariel Cobbert/The Commercial Appeal



AB Mauri Fleischmann's yeast manufacturing plant manager Janice Williams in Memphis, Tenn., on Thursday, April 2, 2020. Ariel Cobbert/The Commercial Appeal



Inside the AB Mauri Fleischmann's yeast manufacturing plant in Memphis, Tenn., on Thursday, April 2, 2020. Ariel Cobbert/The Commercial Appeal

Yeast are single-celled fungi that have been used to make bread for thousands of years. Active dry yeast is the kind used by most at-home bakers.

Manufacturing plants feed the yeast with carbohydrates and nutrients and grow it in a series of larger and larger vessels where they can reproduce. It's then filtered, dried and packaged. From the start of the growing cycle to leaving the plant warehouse, yeast production takes about 10 days, and there are no shortcuts, Heilman says.

## **In American homes, it's Christmas in the spring**

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Until supplies of dry yeast are replenished, at-home bakers say they are getting creative. They are growing their own starter or finding recipes that don't call for yeast.

Aimee Murray's 14-year-old daughter, Elise, loves baking soft pretzels and other treats, but her mom is rationing supplies of yeast as well as gluten-free flour.

Murray, 38, a high school counselor in Arlington, Texas, hasn't been able to find either on her shopping trips but ordered two bags of flour on Amazon before, she said, the price tripled.

"We're looking at making more breads, but we can't until we find more yeast," Murray said.



Elise Murray, 14, of Arlington, Texas is baking more because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Her favorite item to bake is chocolate chip pecan cookies. (Photo: Aimee Murray)

There's usually a lull in demand for yeast in the first part of the year after the flurry of winter holiday baking. In the Fremont, California home of Carrie Cardona, a recruiter, every day is Christmas now. Cardona's 8-year-old daughter and 41-year-old boyfriend, Jerry Brummett – the designated shopper – are the recipients of all the banana bread and cookies she's making.

Brummett says he has tried store after store – Safeway, Sprouts, Lucky Supermarkets, Walmart and Whole Foods Market – in his hunt for more yeast but has struck out everywhere.

Without yeast, Cardona, 43, is resorting to recipes that don't require it. "It tastes better when you make it at home," she said.



Carrie Cardona, of Fremont, California, is baking breads that don't require yeast like banana and chocolate chip bread. (Photo: Carrie Cardona)

With yeast or without, baking up coronavirus comfort food does have a downside. Popular Instagram memes poke fun at all the extra pounds people are putting on.

"We're all getting heavier because we're baking more," Cardona said.

If your bread is feeling a little stiff, it doesn't necessarily have to go in the trash can. USA TODAY

**Need yeast? Here are some tips**

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**Search for recipes that don't require yeast.** Banana bread, zucchini bread and cookies are among the top recipes that don't need yeast.

**Ask a friend or neighbor.** With yeast being a pantry staple, perhaps friends who are not bakers have a packet to spare. Also ask friends to monitor store inventory to limit grocery trips.

**Look in non-conventional spots.** Some restaurants from national chains to locally owned eateries have opened markets and are selling groceries including flour, They may also have yeast for sale.

**Make your own.** Washington State University's [Bread Lab](#) has a recipe for a sourdough starter on its website, which is a way to grow yeast. The process does take time and if you go the DIY route, you can't use the starter as a replacement for store-bought dry yeast in the same amounts. There are many other yeast recipes and videos on YouTube.

**Look for alternatives.** Baking powder or baking soda with lemon juice, vinegar or buttermilk can also act as a leavening agent, according to [Thekitchn.com](#).

**Have expired yeast?** It might still be effective but before adding to a recipe, do a [yeast freshness test](#). The Red Star Yeast website outlines the steps to take.

**Be wary when shopping online.** Some Amazon reviewers are noting the yeast they purchased is expired. If that's the case, check the effectiveness before use.

**Check and check again.** Baker's yeast is expected to be restocked in the next month or two.