



Fond du Lac Public Library

Breads of the World: Israel

Presented 3/21/2017 by Dusty Krikau

Challah

Makes 2 loaves

In a small, non-metal bowl, combine then set aside:

- 2¼ teaspoons yeast (one packet)
- 2 Tablespoons sugar
- ½ cup warm water (about 120-130 degrees)

In a liquid measuring cup, whisk until combined:

- 1 cup warm water
- ¼ cup vegetable or olive oil
- 2 eggs

In a large bowl, combine and set aside:

- 5 cups bread flour
- 1 teaspoon kosher salt

Also needed:

1 additional cup of bread flour

Olive oil

1 egg

Additional kosher salt, for topping

(Optional) Savory spice blend: 1 teaspoon basil, ½ teaspoon each oregano & marjoram, ¼ teaspoon sage, dash of celery seed

(Or, also optional) Sweet add-ins: 1 teaspoon cinnamon, ½ teaspoon sugar, dash of nutmeg, 1-2 chopped baking apples, honey and chopped pecans

Directions:

- Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Prepare a large (at least 10 inches x 15 inches) baking sheet with silicon mat or parchment.
- If making savory option, stir all savory additions into dry mixture and proceed with recipe. If making sweet option, stir cinnamon, sugar and nutmeg into dry ingredients and proceed with recipe.
- Make a small hollow in the dry ingredients. Add all wet ingredients (yeast mix and water-oil-egg mix). Use a wooden spoon or Danish whisk to combine until all flour has been incorporated. Add up to one additional cup of flour until mixture is dry enough to knead. Dump the contents of the bowl onto flour-dusted counter and knead until all the flour has been incorporated, adding 1/8 cup of flour at a time if too wet. Final result should be similar to a slightly sticky Play-doh.
- Drizzle a small amount of olive oil in a mixing bowl and swirl dough in bowl to coat all sides with oil. Cover with a clean towel. Let rise till doubled in size, approximately 1 hour.
- Remove dough from bowl and cut into equally sized pieces based on number of strands preferred for braiding (see below). Roll pieces into long strands about an inch in diameter. If dough becomes stiff and difficult to

stretch, let it rest, covered with a tea towel, for 10-20 minutes. This allows the gluten to relax and will make the dough more pliable.

- If making sweet bread, flatten strands on counter and place chopped apples (and nuts, if using) in the middle of the strand, drizzle lightly with honey, and roll dough around filling. Continue with recipe.

Three-strand braiding

Cut dough into 6 equal-sized pieces; 3 per loaf

Directions: Lay two strands on counter in an X and the third strand straight through the middle of the X. Braid from middle to one end. Pinch and tuck end under the loaf. Then braid from middle to other end, pinching and tucking end under the loaf.

Repeat with other loaf.

Four-strand braiding

Cut dough into 4 equal-sized pieces; 2 per loaf

Directions: Bend each strand in half and lay on counter, overlapping strands at their bends. Beginning from either the left or the right, cross one strand over, under and over the other strands or vice versa (under, over, under). Continue weaving, always starting from the same side. Pinch and tuck end under the loaf.

Repeat with other loaf.

Six-strand braiding

Requires 6 equal-sized pieces; 3 per loaf

Bend each strand in half and lay on counter, overlapping strands at their bends. Beginning from either the left or the right, cross one strand over, under, over, under and over the other strands or vice versa (under, over, under, over, under). Continue weaving always starting from the same side. Pinch and tuck end under the loaf.

Repeat with other loaf.

- Lift and place completed braids on prepared baking sheet, equally spaced apart.
- Let rest for 20 minutes to an hour. If you're in a rush, you can skip this resting stage.
- Beat 1 egg in a small bowl and brush onto each loaf. Sprinkle with kosher salt for a pretzel-like appearance.
- Bake at 375 degrees for about 35 minutes. To check for doneness, lift loaf and thump on the bottom; it should sound hollow and feel slightly stiff to the touch. If it's still bendy, put it back in for a couple more minutes.
- Let bread cool to finish baking.

Challah is intended to be torn, but works great sliced and made into French toast.

Storage:

First option: Eat it all.

Second option: Eat as much as you like and then let the loaf sit out to stale a bit. This will help the crust stay firm. We usually leave it out after dinner and then put it away when we go to bed that night. We store it in an empty sandwich-bread bag or plastic grocery bag. Tie or twist-tie it closed. Storing in plastic keeps the bread soft, but plastic traps moisture, which makes the staling step important. Without some drying time, you'd end up with soggy bread. Never store bread in plastic when the loaf is still warm.

Additional notes:

- What we refer to as "challah" is the loaf; however, in Jewish law, challah is a reference to the command, or "mitzvah," to remove a small portion of dough and offer it to G-d by Temple priests. (Numbers 15:20) Since the destruction of the Temple makes this impossible, the mitzvah is remembered by removing 1/24th of the loaf during kneading and ceremonially burning it in the oven. When baking with less than 8 cups of flour, the separating and burning are not required.
- Challah is prepared in different shapes for different Jewish holidays.
- Sweet challah is usually reserved for Rosh Hashanah as a celebration of the sweet New Year.