

<b>02/24/10 - Homemade Challah with Honey</b>
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Challah is the quintessential Jewish Sabbath and holiday bread. Bread baked from the staff of life has a spiritual essence that affirms our connection to the earth's harvest and sustains us. This Challah is sweet and moist. It has the long stranded texture of bread due to the use of high gluten content flour and kneading in the food processor. From one recipe, you can make one huge Challah or it makes two medium size Challahs for the Shabbat. You could make 'panezicos' or individual rolls.

2 packages active dry yeast (rapid rise is great)

1 cup warm water

1 teaspoon sugar

3 extra-large eggs room temperature

1/2 cup safflower oil

1/3 cup honey

6 cups better for bread flour more or less

2 teaspoons salt

1 teaspoon anise seeds (optional)

1 egg beaten

Corn meal

Sesame seeds



Preheat the oven to 350°. Dust a large baking sheet with a layer of corn meal. Corn meal acts like little ball bearings and keeps the bread from sticking without greasing the baking sheet.

Proof the yeast in warm water with the sugar and honey. Proofing is to check if the yeast is active. Place the yeast in the water and when it starts to foam you know the yeast is alive. Once the yeast and water are foaming, add the oil. Check your room temperature eggs in a separate glass cup or bowl for any defects. Place 3 cups of bread flour and the salt and anise in the bowl of a large food processor. Pulse the flour to blend in the salt. Add the liquids, including the eggs, and process until very smooth. Add the additional 3 cups of flour and process until a ball forms, continue processing until the dough is a smooth ball, about 60 seconds total. If the dough is sticky, add a little more flour until you have the right texture. The dough should be silky smooth, not too soft nor too hard. If your processor is too small, it may stall out after you add the second 3 cups of flour. In that case remove the dough and knead by hand until very smooth and not sticky. Alternatively you could use a large stand mixer or knead the entire mess by hand like my mother used to do.

Place the kneaded dough ball in a bowl and cover with a loose piece of plastic wrap and then a tea towel. Place the bowl in warm draft free place. Let it rise about 2 hours or until doubled in volume. Separate the challah.\* Punch the dough down (it deflates).



Remove the dough from the bowl and gather it into a ball, then form a long cylinder. Holding the cylinder at both ends, shake it longer and longer to about 3 feet. Divide the dough in half for two Challahs. Cut each half into three equal sections. Roll and pull each section in to a log about 12 inches by 1 and ½ inches wide. Braid your challah from the middle out to the two ends. Seal the ends of the braids well so they will not open. Once you have braided them, place the breads carefully on your corn meal dusted baking sheet. Cover breads with a tea towel and let them rise again until double. Challahs are made in different shapes for different holidays, as you can see from the pictures.



When the loaves double in size, beat the last egg, and brush it carefully on the Challah with a light hand, taking care not to drip. I prefer using a small silicone basting brush to apply the egg. Sprinkle with sesame seeds. Bake 30-35 minutes depending on the size, until dark golden brown. Remove from the oven and place baked breads on cooling rack to preserve the crisp bottoms.

Sometimes, I make the Challahs ahead and freeze them individually in heavy duty foil wrap. I reheat them in the foil in the oven. They taste freshly made when reheated like this. You can make several batches at once and freeze.



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