

Sara Franco's Challah

Anne Byrn/Between the Layers

I feel like I've covered the playbook in making Sara's challah, but if you have any further questions, you know you can leave a comment and ask a question. One thing about bread baking - never be ashamed to ask for help because there are so many wonderful bread bakers out there who are eager to pass along what they know. Sara included! And Sara says that if you don't like the look of your braid, you can unbraid and start over, but you need to let the dough rest and recover on the counter for 20 minutes before rebraiding.

Makes 2 loaves

Prep: 25 to 30 minutes

Rise: 1 hour, 30 to 45 minutes

Bake: 35 to 40 minutes

3/4 cup warm water

1 package (.25 ounces; 2 1/4 teaspoons) active dry yeast

1/4 cup granulated sugar

2 large eggs, lightly beaten

1/2 cup vegetable oil

3 3/4 cups (500 grams) bread flour

1 1/2 teaspoons salt

Glaze:

1 large egg

Poppy or sesame seeds, if desired

1. Place the warm water in a large bowl and whisk in the yeast to dissolve. Whisk in the sugar. Add the 2 beaten eggs and oil, and whisk to combine. Add nearly all the flour (holding back 1/4 cup) and salt, and stir with a wooden spoon until smooth. Add the remaining flour as needed. Cover the bowl with a kitchen towel, and place it in a warm place to rise until doubled, about 1 hour.
2. Punch down the dough in the bowl with your fist, knead it a little with floured hands until the dough is smooth, 3 to 4 minutes. Divide the dough in half. Divide each half into 3 pieces.

3. Working with one set of 3 pieces of dough at a time, roll each piece of dough between your palms or on the counter until it is a rope, about 12- to 15-inch inches long. Lay the 3 ropes side by side. Beginning at the center, braid them, left over right, right over left, until you reach the ends, and tuck them under. Turn the braid 180 degrees to braid the other half in the same fashion. Place this braided loaf on a parchment-lined or lightly greased baking sheet. Repeat the process with the remaining set of 3 pieces of dough, braiding them from the center, turning, braiding again, then placing this braided loaf on the pan. (Or, if not braiding the loaves, don't divide each half into three parts. Place each in lightly greased 8-inch loaf pans.
4. Cover the loaves with a kitchen towel, and let rise in a warm place until nearly doubled, about 30 to 45 minutes.
5. Place a rack in the center of the oven, and preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Lightly beat the egg for the glaze in a small bowl. Brush the bread with the beaten egg, and sprinkle with poppy or sesame seeds, if desired. Place in the oven.
6. Bake the challah until it is golden brown, about 20 minutes, and tent with aluminum foil. Continue baking 15 to 20 minutes more, or until it tests done. Remove it to a rack to cool completely, about 1 hour, then slice and serve. To store, wrap in foil, for up to five days. Or freeze for up to six months.