

Babka

INGREDIENTS

Dough Ingredients

- 1 packet active dry yeast or 2 1/4 tsp
- 2/3 cup whole milk warmed to 110 degrees F, plus 1 additional tbsp for egg wash
- 5 tbsp unsalted butter at room temperature
- 3 tbsp granulated sugar plus 1 tsp for yeast
- 1 1/2 tbsp flavorless cooking oil (grapeseed is an option)
- 1 1/2 tsp vanilla extract
- 4 egg yolks reserve 1 egg white for egg wash
- 2 1/2 - 3 1/4 cups all purpose flour (flour amount detailed in instructions below)
- 1 tsp kosher salt

Chocolate Filling Ingredients

- 2 cups finely chopped, good quality dark chocolate (two 4 oz. bars of dark chocolate)
- 2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1/3 cup unsalted butter cold

Streusel Ingredients

- 1/4 cup dark brown sugar
- 1/4 cup all purpose flour
- 2 tbsp unsalted butter cold and cut into small pieces
- 1/4 tsp kosher salt

NOTES

You will also need: Mixing bowls, whisk, stand mixer with paddle attachment and dough hook attachment, rolling pin, 9x5 loaf pan, nonstick cooking spray, parchment paper, pastry brush

INSTRUCTIONS

To prepare the dough: Start by dissolving the yeast in the warm milk along with 1 tsp sugar. If you do not have a thermometer, the milk should be warm to the touch but not hot. Whisk the yeast into the milk along with 1 tsp sugar to dissolve. Over the next few minutes, the milk/yeast mixture should become foamy as the yeast begins to grow. If it doesn't, this likely means that your yeast has expired or the milk was too hot, causing it to die. Get some fresh yeast and try again, otherwise your babka won't rise... and that would be a major bummer.

While the yeast proofs, cream together the butter and sugar in a stand mixer fit with the paddle attachment.

Once the butter and sugar are well combined, add the oil and vanilla extract and mix well at low speed. Add egg yolks 1 at a time and increase the mixer to high. Beat for an additional 2 minutes.

Turn the mixer back to low speed and add 2 1/2 cups flour and 1 tsp salt, then add the foamy yeast mixture. Be sure to give the yeast mixture a final whisk before adding it in, especially if it is very foamy.

Mix until just combined, then replace the paddle attachment with the dough hook. Continue to mix, adding 1 tbsp of flour at a time, just until a soft dough forms. The amount of flour you need will vary based on humidity and altitude; best to add flour slowly and check texture as you go.

You want a dough that is soft a pliable, not stiff. The dough should be tacky, but not wet or sticky, and shouldn't cling to the skin. Do not walk away during this part, you also want to keep an eye on the dough to make sure that you do not over mix it. It should be easy to form into a smooth ball.

Once a soft dough forms that can easily be removed from the hook by hand, transfer it to a lightly floured surface and knead several times, or until you have a smooth ball of dough. Do not over-knead.

Place the ball of dough into a greased mixing bowl and cover with plastic wrap. I usually let the dough rise in the refrigerator overnight, but if you prefer you can let it rise at room temperature for 1-2 hours, or until it has just about doubled in size.

To prepare the chocolate filling: In a mixing bowl, combine the grated or finely chopped chocolate, cinnamon and butter. Mix with hands until well combined, it should have a chunky texture. Set aside.

Remove the dough from the refrigerator and allow to come to room temperature, about 1 hour. Once the dough reaches room temperature, roll it on a lightly floured surface until you have a 14x18 inch rectangle.

Evenly sprinkle the chocolate filling over the dough, leaving an even 1-inch border around the edge. Then, starting with the long side, roll the dough into a tight log.

Roll the log back and forth several times, gently spreading it out until the length of the log is about 20 inches.

Twist the dough into a figure 8 and pinch the ends together. Sometimes using a bit of water will help the ends to stick. Line your loaf pan with parchment paper, then lightly spray the parchment with nonstick cooking oil spray. Transfer the dough to the lined loaf pan. Cover the pan with a tea towel, or loosely with plastic wrap, and allow to rise for 1 hour, or until the babka completely fills the pan. It will get pretty big!

While the dough is rising, prepare the streusel by combining the ingredients in a mixing bowl until well combined and crumbly.

Once the dough has risen, preheat oven to 350 degrees F.

Using a very thin skewer, poke a few holes into the babka. This allows steam to be released during baking so that you aren't left with very large gaps between the dough and the filling.

Brush the babka with an egg wash made from 1 egg white whisked together with 1 tbsp of whole milk.

Sprinkle the streusel over the top of the babka. It will collect more in the crevices, but this is fine. Babka should have a rustic look.

Place the pan on a baking sheet and bake for 25 minutes, then turn the pan 180 degrees and cook for an additional 25 to 30 minutes, or until it reaches an internal temperature of 185 degrees F in the thickest center part of the babka. The babka will be golden brown and should have a hollow sound when tapped.

Allow the babka to cool before slicing. This is truly the hardest part of the whole process, but trust me - cutting into it while it's still hot will leave you with quite a mess. The filling needs time to set up a bit. Even after cooling it will crumble a bit when you slice it. That's part of the charm. Serve with coffee or tea and enjoy your babka bliss!

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