

Czernowitzer Challah

Adapted from Maggie Glezer

This is a classic European challah. It holds its shape beautifully and is a great choice for showing off a fancy shaped challah. It is very flavorful.

2¼ teaspoons instant yeast or 1 package active dry yeast

about 3¾ cups bread flour

¾ cups warm water

2 large eggs, plus 1 for glazing

½ cup canola or vegetable oil

1½ teaspoons salt

½ cup sugar

½ cup raisins (optional)

poppy seeds or sesame seeds for sprinkling

Mixing the Yeast Slurry

In a large bowl, whisk together the yeast and ¾ cup of the flour, then whisk in the warm water until smooth. Let the yeast slurry stand uncovered for 10 to 20 minutes, or until it begins to ferment and puff up slightly.

Mixing the Dough

Whisk the 2 eggs, oil, salt, and sugar into the puffed yeast slurry until the eggs are well incorporated and the salt and sugar have dissolved. If you like raisins in your challah, add them now. With a wooden spoon, stir in the remaining 3 cups of flour one cup at a time. When the mixture is a shaggy ball, gently scrape it out with the spoon onto your work surface and knead the dough until it is smooth and soft, up to 10 minutes. The dough should feel smooth and firm and knead easily without sticking to the work surface. (Try to be a bit stingy when you mix in the last ½ cup of flour. It is better for dough to be just a tiny bit sticky than overly dry.)

Fermenting the Dough

Place the dough back into the bowl and cover it with plastic wrap. (The dough can be refrigerated now and it can ferment in the refrigerator for up to 24 hours.) Let the dough ferment on the counter until it has doubled in bulk, about 2 hours. (In the refrigerator, the dough needs at least three hours to ferment.)

Shaping and Proofing the Dough

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper or oil the sheet. Divide the dough in two and braid and shape each piece. Position them on the prepared sheet, cover well with plastic wrap and let proof until well risen, between 1 ½ and two hours. (After shaping, the dough can be refrigerated for up to 24 hours. Then, when taken out of refrigerator it needs 1-2 hours to proof before baking.) About 30 minutes before baking, preheat the oven to 350 degrees and place the rack in the upper third of the oven.

Baking the Loaves

When the loaves have risen well and do not push back when gently pressed with your finger but remain indented, brush them with the egg glaze. Sprinkle with seeds, and bake the loaves for 30 to 40 minutes, until very well browned. After the first 20 minutes, switch the loaves from front to back so that they brown evenly. Brush the loaves again with the egg glaze. If the loaves are browning too quickly, tent them with aluminum foil. When done, remove the loaves from the oven and cool on a rack.

At the end of baking, you can test the temperature of the challah with an instant read thermometer. Anything between 195 and 205 degrees or so should guarantee a well-baked, flavorful challah.