

Olive Oil Challah

Adapted from Maggie Glezer

This is an amazing, savory-tasting Challah that has a wonderfully moist texture and a flaky, brittle crust. When the dough is mixed, it is smooth and soft. This is a great bread to make on Shabbat of Chanukah and all other Shabbatot.

1 teaspoon instant yeast or 1¼ teaspoons active dry yeast
3¾ cups bread flour
1¼ cups warm water
½ cup good extra virgin olive oil
2 teaspoons table salt
Sesame seeds for sprinkling

Mixing the Yeast Slurry

In a large bowl, whisk together the yeast and 1¼ cups of flour, then whisk in the warm water until smooth. Let the slurry stand uncovered for about 10 minutes, until it begins to ferment and puff up slightly.

Mixing the Dough

Whisk the oil and the salt into the puffed yeast slurry until the mixture is smooth and the salt has dissolved. Stir in the remaining 2½ cups of flour all at once. When the mixture is a shaggy ball, scrape it out onto your work surface and knead it until it is well mixed, fairly smooth and soft. The dough should feel soft and glossy and possibly greenish if you use highly pigmented oil.

Fermenting the Dough

When the dough is fully kneaded, place it in a bowl and cover it with plastic wrap. Let it ferment until it has tripled in bulk, between 2 and 3 hours, depending on the temperature in your kitchen.

Shaping and Refrigerating the Dough

Line a baking sheet with parchment paper; if you use aluminum foil, oil it. Shape into two 1pound loaves or whatever. Cover well with plastic wrap and refrigerate for at least 8 hours, or up to 24 hours. This is a very important step. This slow fermentation process allows for wonderful flavor development of the acetic acid in the dough.

Proofing the Dough

About 2½ hours before you are ready to bake, remove the loaves from the refrigerator and let them proof until tripled in size. Meanwhile, 30 minutes before baking, preheat the oven to 425 degrees and arrange the oven rack in the upper third position.

Baking the Loaves

When the loaves have tripled and do not push back when gently pressed with your finger but remain indented, brush them all over with water, then sprinkle them with sesame seeds. I usually use toasted sesame seeds, as I prefer the golden color. Bake the two breads approximately 40 minutes, until very deeply browned (midway, switch the breads from front to back for even baking). When done, let them cool on a rack.