

BREAD

Traditional Soft, Fluffy Challah for Shabbat

By Miriam Szokovski



Meat/Dairy:
Pareve

Time: > 60
Minutes

Difficulty:
Intermediate

**Health &
Allergies:**
Vegetarian,
Dairy-Free

With Pesach over, you have a couple of days to stock up on flour and yeast, pull out your mixing bowls and turn out some braided loaves of soft, pillowy goodness. Trust me, it's well worthwhile! (And I say that having made it four days *before* (!) Pesach, after a series of mini-kitchen disasters.)

Choose a very large bowl. You can see from my pictures that my bowl was not large enough, so after making the dough I transferred it to a large disposable pan to rise.

This recipe yields enough dough for six loaves, and the dough needs enough space to double in size while rising.

NOTE: I've included recipes for 1 loaf or 2 loaves at the bottom of this post.

To help with the rising, in the summertime, I sometimes put the dough outside in a sunny spot. In the winter, I start preheating my oven and put the bowl on the stovetop. The heat comes up and creates a warm space for the dough. After an hour and a half, the dough should be double its original size and ready to work with.

After the dough has risen, it's time to do the mitzvah of separating challah. Say the blessing, separate a small piece of dough, and set it aside to burn after the challah has finished baking. For more about this mitzvah, and a step-by-step guide, watch this quick do-it-yourself clip.

Now divide the dough into six relatively equal pieces. Each of the six pieces will make one challah, or you can use some of the dough to make rolls. I made four full-sized challahs and eight rolls.

Ready to start? Pick up one of your chunks of dough, roll it out and cut into three (as pictured). Then roll out each of the three pieces, and you'll be ready to braid.

Pinch the three strands together at one end and begin to braid. If you've ever braided hair, you know how to braid challah. It's exactly the same. It's a repetitive motion of crossing the outer strands over the middle strand. Start with the right strand and pull it over the middle so it's now in the center. Now pull the left strand over the new center strand, and again pull the right strand over the middle. Repeat until the loaf is fully braided, then pinch the ends together tightly. For a neater, rounder look, tuck both ends under the loaf (see the difference in the picture).

Making challah rolls is a bit simpler. Instead of cutting the dough into three pieces, cut it into four. Roll each one up individually as pictured. Tuck the ends under when done—this will stop them from unrolling.



If you're finding the braiding tricky, you can use the roll technique to make large round challahs as well. Simply roll one of the original six chunks of dough into a line, roll up as pictured and tuck the end underneath.

NOTE: This recipe yields 6 loaves. Scroll down for the recipe for 1 loaf or 2 loaves.

Dough Ingredients:

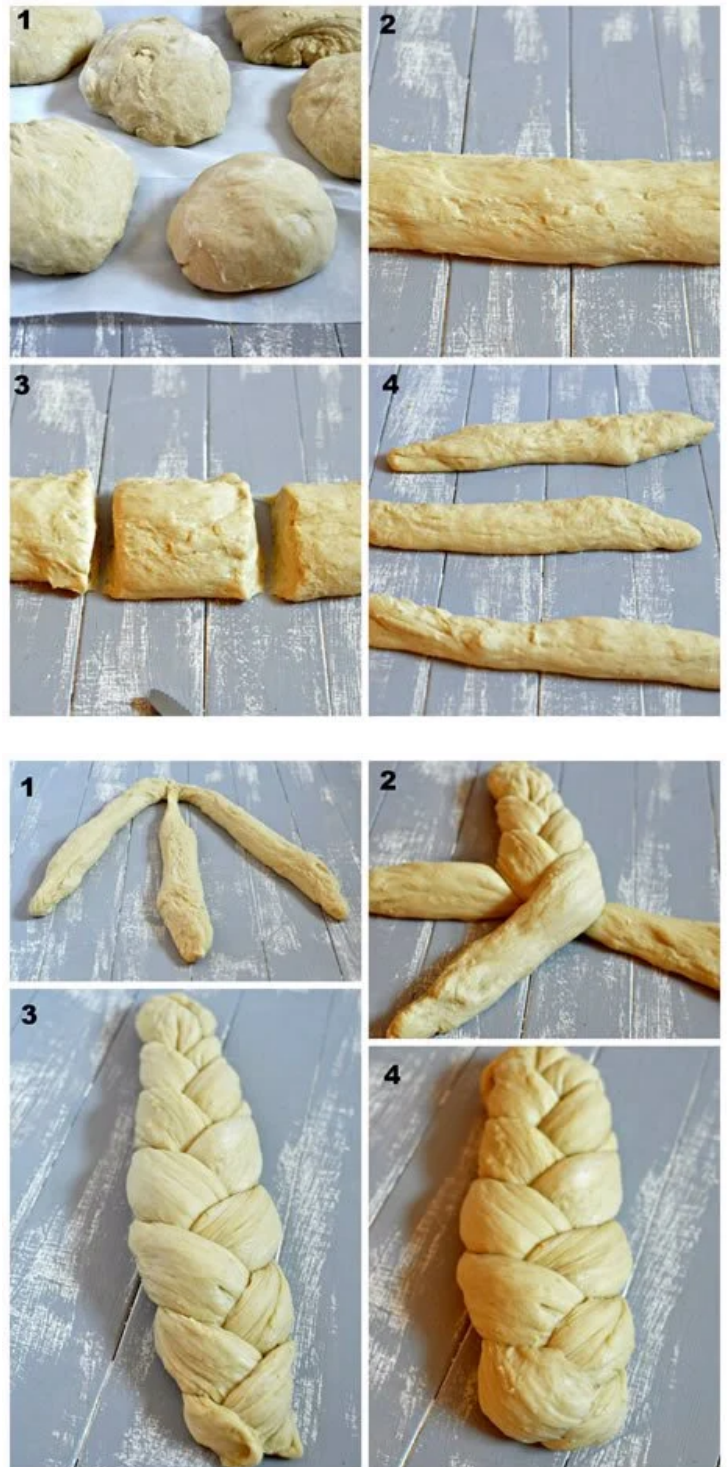
- 4 tbsp. dry yeast
- 2 tbsp. sugar
- 5 cups very warm water, divided
- 5 large eggs
- 1¼ cups honey
- 1 cup oil (canola or light olive oil)
- 2 tbsp. salt
- Approximately 18 cups flour

For the egg wash:

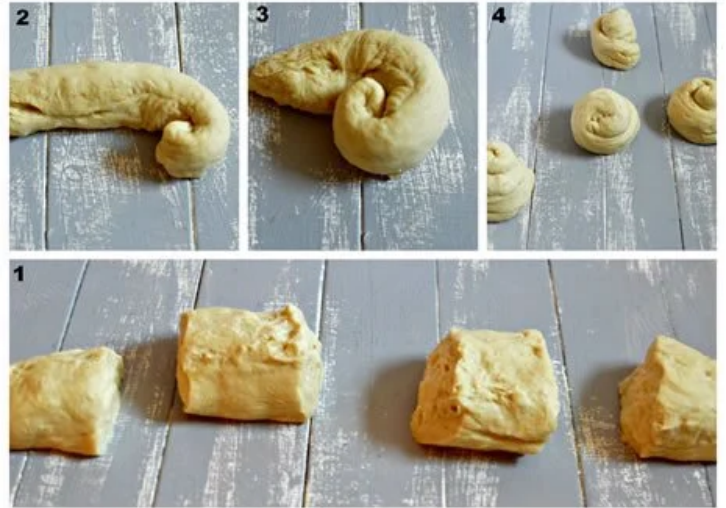
- 1 egg
- 2 tbsp. honey
- 1 tbsp. vanilla

Directions:

- 1 In a very large bowl, dissolve yeast and sugar in 2 cups warm water and let sit about 15–20 minutes until thick and frothy.



2 Add eggs, honey, oil, salt, remaining three cups of water, and half the flour. Mix until a loose batter forms. Add the rest of the flour a couple of cups at a time. You may not need all 18 cups of flour, so go slowly towards the end. Alternatively, you may need slightly more. The dough should be soft but not sticky. Once the dough has enough flour, knead it for a couple of minutes. I do this in the bowl. (You can do this recipe by hand or with a mixer.)



- 3** Cover the dough with a wet towel or plastic wrap and put it in a warm place to rise for about 1½ hours. Dough should double in size.
- 4** Punch the dough down and let it rest for 10 minutes. Divide into 6 equal pieces.
- 5** Braid according to pictures and directions above. Place loaves on lightly greased pans and let rise for another 40 minutes.
- 6** Beat the egg with the honey and vanilla and gently brush over the loaves. Bake at 375° F for approximately 45 minutes. Loaves should be golden on top, and firm on the bottom.

There is a tradition in some Jewish communities to make *shlissel challah* the week after Pesach. *Shlissel* means “key,” and the custom involves either baking the challah in the shape of a key, or wrapping one's real house (or business) key in foil and pressing it into the underside of the challah before baking. The key is removed before the challah is eaten, and the tradition is considered a *segulah* (spiritually propitious) for livelihood.

To Make a Smaller Batch of Challah:

For those wondering why I've used such a big recipe, allow me to explain. A big part of making challah, is doing the mitzvah of “taking challah.” This is when we say a blessing and separate a piece of dough, which we must



burn before we can eat the bread. In biblical times, a portion was separated and given to the priests who served in the holy Temple.

Doing this reminds us that whatever we are given is not for our use alone. If we have wisdom, money or good health, our first step is to put them towards a G dly purpose.

In order to separate challah and recite the blessing, the dough should contain at least 59 ounces of flour (i.e. 3.7 lb. or 1.7 kilo). If the amount of flour is between 43 and 59 ounces (2.6 to 3.7 lb., or 1.230 to 1.7 kilo), challah should be separated without a blessing. But if the dough contains less than 43 ounces of flour (2.6 lb. or 1.2 kilo), challah is not separated.

If you don't have a kitchen scale, as many home cooks don't, it's hard to know how much flour you're using. Also different flours weigh different amounts, so it's almost impossible to give equivalent measurements in cups. My recipe calls for 18 cups of flour, which is approximately one 5lb bag, so you know you're definitely in the clear for separating challah and saying the blessing.

If 5-6 loaves is too much for your family, here are a few suggestions:

- 1 You can make a full batch and freeze the extra for the next few weeks. This way you can bake challah once a month, but still have fresh homemade challh each Shabbat. For best results, let the loaves cool fully after removing from the oven, then wrap in foil and place in a zip-top bag, with all the air squeezed out, and freeze.
- 2 You can make a full batch of dough, say the blessing and separate the challah, then divide the dough into 5 pieces and freeze each one in a separate zip-top bag. Each week, remove one (or more) bags from the freezer, bring to room temperature and give it time to rise. Then braid and bake.

Having said that, for those who want to make a small batch, this recipe divides best by 5. So:

For One Loaf:

- 2¼ tsp. dry yeast (0.25 oz. / 7 grams)
- 1 tsp. sugar
- 1 cup warm water
- 1 egg

- ¼ cup honey
- 3 tbsp. oil
- 1 tsp. salt
- Approximately 4 ½ cups flour (as always, add the flour slowly towards the end and feel if the dough needs more or less)

For the egg wash:

- 1 egg
- 2 tbsp. honey
- 1 tbsp. vanilla

Directions:

- 1 Dissolve yeast and sugar in ¼ cup warm water in a medium-sized bowl. Let sit about 15 minutes until thick and frothy.
- 2 Add the egg, honey, oil, salt, remaining ¾ cup of water, and 3 cups of the flour. Mix until a loose batter forms. Add the rest of the flour slowly. You may not need it all, so go slowly towards the end. Alternatively, you may need slightly more. The dough should be soft but not sticky. Once the dough has enough flour, knead it for a couple of minutes. I do this in the bowl. (You can do this recipe by hand or with a mixer.)
- 3 Cover the dough with a wet towel or plastic wrap and put it in a warm place to rise for about 1-1½ hours. Dough should double in size.
- 4 Punch the dough down and let it rest for 10 minutes.
- 5 Braid according to pictures and directions above. Place loaf on lightly greased pans and let rise for another 30-40 minutes.
- 6 Beat the egg with the honey and vanilla and gently brush over the loaves. Bake at 375° F for approximately 35-45 minutes. Loaf should be golden on top, and firm on the bottom.

For Two Loaves:

Two loaves are traditionally used on Shabbat

- 4 ½ tsp. dry yeast (0.5 oz. / 14 grams)
- 2 tsp. sugar
- 2 cups warm water
- 2 eggs
- ½ cup honey
- 6 tbsp. oil
- 2 tsp. salt
- Approximately 9 cups of flour (as always, add the flour slowly towards the end and feel if the dough needs more or less)

For the egg wash:

- 1 egg
- 2 tbsp. honey
- 1 tbsp. vanilla

Directions:

- 1 Dissolve yeast and sugar in ½ cup warm water in a medium-sized bowl. Let sit about 15 minutes until thick and frothy.
- 2 Add the eggs, honey, oil, salt, remaining 1½ cups of water, and half the flour. Mix until a loose batter forms. Add the rest of the flour slowly. You may not need it all, so go slowly towards the end. Alternatively, you may need slightly more. The dough should be soft but not sticky. Once the dough has enough flour, knead it for a couple of minutes. I do this in the bowl. (You can do this recipe by hand or with a mixer.)

- 3 Cover the dough with a wet towel or plastic wrap and put it in a warm place to rise for about 1-1½ hours. Dough should double in size.
- 4 Punch the dough down and let it rest for 10 minutes.
- 5 Divide dough into two equal pieces. Each will be one loaf. Braid according to pictures and directions above. Place loaves on lightly greased pans and let rise for another 30-40 minutes.
- 6 Beat the egg with the honey and vanilla and gently brush over the loaves. Bake at 375° F for approximately 35-45 minutes. Loaves should be golden on top, and firm on the bottom.

TAGS

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Bread

Intermediate

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Oven

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Miriam Szokovski is a writer and editor, and author of the historical novel *Exiled Down Under*. She is a member of the Chabad.org editorial team and also shares her cooking and baking on Chabad.org/food.

Note: All processed foods used for kosher cooking must bear kosher certification, leafy greens and other veggies must be checked for infestations, and all cooking must be done on kosher utensils, with meat and dairy kept separate.

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