

Inside the Jewish Bakery: Challah

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Any of the challah braids
can also be baked in a loaf pan.



Six-braid Hungarian pan barches.



Some of challah's many shapes.
(Courtesy of Sylvia Ginsberg)

Bakery Challah

New York's commercial bakers, ever mindful of their need to keep prices competitive and profit margins healthy, produced this moderately sweet, moderately rich Shabbes loaf for general consumption. Although using egg yolks only is an indulgence for most home bakers, yolks were available fresh at relatively low cost from the scores of Jewish-owned chicken farms that lay across the Hudson River in New Jersey, and later through bakery supply houses, frozen, in 30-pound buckets. This is the challah we grew up on.

Makes two 24 oz./680 g. loaves

INGREDIENT: Bread flour

VOLUME: 5 $\frac{2}{3}$ cups

OUNCES: 28.0

GRAMS: 795

BAKER'S PERCENTAGE: 100%

INGREDIENT: Granulated sugar

VOLUME: 1/3 cup + 1 Tbs.

OUNCES: 3.0

GRAMS: 85

BAKER'S PERCENTAGE: 11%

INGREDIENT: Table salt

VOLUME: 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp.

OUNCES: 0.5

GRAMS: 14

BAKER'S PERCENTAGE: 2%

INGREDIENT: Instant yeast

VOLUME: 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp.

OUNCES: 0.3

GRAMS: 10

BAKER'S PERCENTAGE: 1%

INGREDIENT: Egg yolks

VOLUME: 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ large

OUNCES: 4.5

GRAMS: 130

BAKER'S PERCENTAGE: 16%

INGREDIENT: Vegetable oil

VOLUME: ¼ cup

OUNCES: 1.5

GRAMS: 45

BAKER'S PERCENTAGE: 6%

INGREDIENT: Warm (90° F./32° C.) water

VOLUME: 1½ cups

OUNCES: 12.0

GRAMS: 340

BAKER'S PERCENTAGE: 43%

INGREDIENT: Egg whites, for glazing

VOLUME: 2 large

OUNCES: 2.3

GRAMS: 65

BAKER'S PERCENTAGE: —

INGREDIENT: Poppy, sesame or chernushka seed (optional)

VOLUME: 2 Tbs.

OUNCES: 0.5

GRAMS: 14

BAKER'S PERCENTAGE: —

1. Measure flour, sugar, salt and yeast into a mixing bowl or the bowl of a stand mixer, and use the flat (paddle) beater to blend at low (Kitchen Aid, or KA, 2) speed, about 1 minute.
2. In a separate bowl, whisk until blended the egg yolks and vegetable oil. Add the warm water and continue whisking into a smooth emulsion. Add to the dry ingredients and continue mixing until the dough is evenly hydrated and comes together in a shaggy mass, 1 to 2 minutes.
3. Switch to the dough hook, if using a stand mixer, and knead at low (KA 2) speed for 10 to 12 minutes, until the dough forms a smooth, glossy ball that leaves the sides of the bowl. If kneading by hand, turn the dough onto a well-floured work surface and knead for 12 to 14 minutes.
4. Form the dough into a large ball, put it into a greased bowl, cover with a damp towel or cling wrap and allow to ferment until doubled in bulk, 45 to 60 minutes.
5. Turn the dough onto a lightly floured work surface, punch it down and knead it for 1 minute or so, then divide into two pieces of approximately 24 oz./680 g. each.
6. Divide each of these into as many pieces as appropriate for the braid you're using. Roll each piece into a tight ball, cover the balls with a damp towel and allow them to rest for 20 to 30 minutes to relax the gluten.

7. Using your hands, roll each ball into a long sausage that is thick in the middle and tapered to a point at the ends. Braid according to the instructions below.
8. Put the braided loaves on a piece of baking parchment, cover them with a damp towel and allow them to proof until the dough doesn't spring back when a finger is pressed into it.
9. About 20 to 30 minutes before bake time, preheat your oven to 350° F./175° C. with the baking surface in the middle.
10. Brush each loaf lightly with the beaten egg, wait 1 minute and then give them a second coat. Sprinkle with poppy, sesame or chernushka seeds to taste.
11. Slide the loaves and parchment onto your baking stone or bake on a sheet pan for 30 to 40 minutes, turning the loaves halfway through so they'll brown evenly.
12. Transfer the finished loaves to a rack and let cool for at least an hour before cutting.