



Faith Kramer's Challah Recipe

Makes about 1½ lbs. challah—equivalent to 1 large challah, 2 medium, or 4-5 mini challahs.

This recipe is adapted from one used by the preschool at my synagogue. The children make the bread every Friday. To speed the process, this version calls for instant yeast and some baking shortcuts. Instant yeast is also known as rapid-rise, fast-acting, or bread-machine yeast.

Ingredients

2 Tbs. vegetable oil plus extra for greasing bowl and pans

3 eggs

1 Tbs. water

3 to 4 cups white bread flour

1 package (2 ¼ tsp.) instant yeast

2 Tbs. plus 1 tsp. sugar

1½ tsp. salt

¾ cup warm water (110 degrees)

Toppings (kids' favorite part!)

Directions

Lightly grease a large bowl with oil (I use glass so it's easier for the child to watch the dough rise). Line a large baking sheet pan with parchment paper or aluminum foil. Lightly grease with oil.

Break 2 eggs into a small bowl. Separate the third egg. Add that egg white to the other eggs and beat. Place yolk from the third egg in a separate small bowl. Mix with 1 Tbs. water to make an egg wash. Cover. Refrigerate until needed.

Place 3 cups flour in second large bowl. Sprinkle the yeast, sugar and salt on top. Add the warm water. Stir with a heavy spoon. Add the beaten eggs and the oil. Mix well. Continue stirring until a rough ball of dough forms. If the dough is too wet, stir in more flour. If it is too dry, sprinkle water on top. Dough will be sticky but should hold together.

Lightly flour work surfaces such as large cutting boards. To knead the dough, have children flour their hands and form dough portions into balls, then flatten. Next, fold in half and press down with their hands to flatten again. Then fold that in half and repeat. Knead the flattened pieces 8-12 minutes until the dough is smooth but still tacky, sprinkling with water or flour as needed. The dough is ready when a pinch of dough feels as springy as pinching your earlobe. Re-combine into one ball and knead 2-3 minutes.

Place the dough in the oiled bowl. (I like to mark the dough level on the outside so children can track its rise.) Turn it to coat with oil. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap. Place in a draft-free, warm place until the dough has doubled in size. (Timing will vary, but about 30 minutes.)

Heat oven to 375 degrees and take egg glaze from refrigerator.

Have children punch down the dough with their fists to deflate it. Place dough on floured work surface. Knead for 2 minutes. Give each child some dough to shape (see next step). For mini challahs, divide dough into four or five pieces.

Have children flour hands. For mini challahs, help them divide their dough pieces into two or three roughly equal sections (for braiding) and roll those into balls and then roll the balls into ropes or snakes about 6 to 8 inches long and ½ to 1 inch thick. They can twist two ropes together or, with help, braid three ropes together to make mini challahs. (See Shaping and Braiding notes below).

Place challahs on baking pan (creations with vastly different thickness should go on separate baking sheets for varied baking times). Have children paint the top and sides with the egg wash with a pastry brush then sprinkle toppings over them (toppings are optional).

Turn oven down to 350 degrees. Place baking pans in oven. Bake about 15 to 30 minutes (depending on challah sizes) until top is golden, bottom is browned, and the breads sound hollow when tapped on the underside of the baked loaf. An instant-read thermometer should register 190 degrees. Transfer to a wire rack. Cool completely.

Toppings

Have ready toppings such as sesame seeds, coarse salt, colored sugars, colored or chocolate sprinkles, and cinnamon sugar.

Shaping and Braiding Notes

For one loaf, divide dough into 3 equal pieces then form ropes about 18 inches long. Place ropes flat. Pinch together at one end. Pass rope on your right over the center rope. The rope that started on the right is the new center rope. Pass rope on the left over the center one. (The original center rope is on the right, the original right rope is on the left, and the original left rope is now in the center.) Repeat. Pinch the ropes together at the other end. Tuck both pinched ends underneath the loaf.

Faith Kramer is a food writer and recipe developer concentrating on the foodways, history, and customs of the Jewish diaspora. She is the author most recently of [52 Shabbats: Friday Night Dinners Inspired by a Global Jewish Kitchen](#).

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Challah photograph by Faith Kramer



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