

When You Get Home: Finishing Your Challah

If you don't have time tonight:

Put the covered foil pan in the freezer. Your shaped dough will stay happy for a week without baking. When you're ready to bake and eat, set the pan on the counter so the dough can defrost and rise. Dough should be at room temperature before you egg wash the challah and preheat the oven.

If you want to bake and share your bread right now:

Preheat your oven to 400 degrees. Uncover your challah [discard the plastic wrap], brush it with a beaten egg or a little bit of milk (milk will make your challah dairy instead of neutral!) , and let it soak up some vibes while your oven fully preheats. Put the foil pan in the oven and immediately *lower the temperature* to **325 degrees**. Bake for 35-45 minutes until the bread's center tests to 180F with an instant thermometer *or* the braid is deep golden brown and sounds hollow when tapped on the bottom. Homemade challah may be a darker color than purchased challah! If you really like a lighter bake, shield the top of the loaf with foil once it's as golden as you like.

Ingredients and Method for Two Loaves of Challah

Note: Cooking is done by heart. Baking is done by weight ratio. If you don't have one, a food scale is the ideal wishlist item for a baker. An inexpensive one is just as great as a fancy model!

DOUGH (can be scaled up to allow challah to be taken; triple amounts)

320 grams (1½ cups) **water**
14 grams (1½ tbsp) **dry active yeast**
800 grams (about 6½ cups) sifted **bread flour**
80 grams (6½ tbsp) **sugar**
12 grams (4 tsp) **table salt**
2 **eggs**
60 grams (1/3 cup) **canola or other neutral oil**

FINISHING

Inclusions (optional): 120 grams chocolate chips, sprinkles, chopped fresh apple or fig, or pre-soaked dried fruit like raisins or apricots

1 **egg** (for egg wash)

1. Pour warm water (110-115F) into a large mixing bowl and sprinkle the dry active yeast into the water. Let sit for about 5 minutes to allow the yeast to activate. If you don't see bubbles, throw out the yeast-water mixture, wipe out your bowl, and begin again.
2. Add flour, then all the other dough ingredients.
3. Using your hands and/or a scraper, combine the ingredients until the flour is incorporated, then remove the dough from the bowl and knead by hand for approximately 8 minutes or until smooth, using the smallest amount of dusting flour possible. The dough may feel sticky, but over-floured dough will bake up dense and dry. Form the dough into a tight, even ball.
4. Proof the dough: clean and lightly oil the mixing bowl you used, place the ball of dough in it, cover with plastic wrap or a tea towel, and leave the dough alone in a warm place for 30 minutes. **Challah dough that proofs longer will be harder to shape and braid.*
5. Turn the dough onto a lightly floured surface. Divide it in two and set one portion aside in the bowl, covered.

If you're making a lot of challah, go to the challah blessing (next page) now.

6. If you're using inclusions like raisins, knead them in now.
7. Divide the first piece of dough into 3 or 6 parts, depending on the braid you want to make. You can weigh each part for consistency or just do this "by eye." Shape these smaller parts into balls, and work each ball of dough into a strand or snake, by rolling or pulling gently.
8. Braid the strands as desired and repeat inclusions (if any), dividing, and shaping strands for your second loaf.
9. [You can freeze unbaked loaves here. *Place the braided challah(s) directly into the freezer. Once solid* wrap gently in plastic, then tinfoil to store frozen.] Set each shaped loaf on a parchment-lined baking sheet, cover, and let rise for 90 minutes or until doubled in size.
10. Beat the reserved egg in a small bowl and gently brush it over the challah, taking care to cover the entire surface without allowing the egg wash to pool.
11. Gently load both baking sheets into the oven and immediately **lower the temperature to 325 degrees**. Bake 35-45 minutes, rotating pans halfway through for consistency, until the bread's center tests to 180F with an instant thermometer *or* the braid is deep golden brown and sounds hollow when tapped on the bottom. Homemade challah may be a darker color than purchased challah! If you really like a lighter bake, shield the top of the loaf with foil once it's as golden as you like.

When You're Baking to Share: The Challah Blessing

*If you're making one or two loaves of challah for your family's Shabbat table, you don't need to take challah. If you're using more than **14 cups/65 ounces of flour** and the proportionate amount of water, you should take challah and recite the following blessing.*

You will need:

- your large batch of challah dough
- a hand-size piece of tinfoil or a paper napkin

Pinch and separate an olive-size piece of dough.

Holding the small piece of challah, say the blessing:

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו וְצִוָּנוּ לְהַפְרִישׁ
חֻלָּה מִן הָעֶסָה.

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav v'tzivanu l'hafreesh challah min ha'eesah.

Blessed are You, Eternal, Ruler of the Universe, who has sanctified us with commandments, and commanded us to separate challah.

Hold up the piece of dough and say "*harei zo challah*" (this is challah).

IMPORTANT: If you don't enjoy the sound of your smoke detector, if it is wired to automatically connect to the fire department, *or* you live in a building with fire-dampening sprinklers, wrap the challah in a napkin or paper towel and discard it in the trash *without* burning.

To burn and discard the challah: wrap the dough in aluminum foil and then burn it in the bottom of the oven as it preheats or as the loaves bake. Some people burn the foil-wrapped piece of dough on the flame of a gas range. Discard the foil-covered remnant.