

Challah

Makes four 1-pound loaves

1 ¾ cups of lukewarm water

1 ½ tablespoons granulated yeast (2 packets)

1 ½ tablespoons Kosher salt

4 large eggs, lightly beaten

½ cup honey

½ cup unsalted butter, melted (or substitute a neutral-tasting oil, like canola), plus more for greasing

7 cups unbleached all-purpose flour

Egg wash (1 large egg beaten with 1 tablespoon of water)

Poppy or sesame seeds for the top

1. Mix the yeast, salt, eggs, honey, and melted butter (oil) with the water in a 5 quart bowl.
2. Mix in the flour without kneading, using a spoon, a 14-cup capacity food processor (with dough attachment), or a heavy-duty stand mixer (with dough hook). Tip: if using your hands to mix, you may want to wet your hands to incorporate the last bit of flour.
3. Cover (not airtight), and allow to rest at room temperature until the dough rises and collapses (or flattens on top), approximately 2 hours.
4. The dough can be used immediately after the initial rise, though it is easier to handle when cold. Refrigerate in a lidded (not airtight) container and use over the next 5 days. Beyond 5 days, freeze in 1 -pound portions in an airtight container for up to 4 weeks. Defrost the frozen dough overnight in the refrigerator before using. Then allow the usual rest and rise time.

On Baking Day:

5. Butter or grease a cookie sheet or line with parchment paper or silicone mat. Dust the surface of the refrigerated dough with flour and cut off a 1-pound (grapefruit size) piece. Dust the piece with more flour and quickly shape it into a ball by stretching the surface of the dough around to the bottom on all four sides, rotating the ball a quarter turn as you go.
6. Divide the ball into thirds, using a dough scraper or knife. Roll the balls between your hands (or on a board), stretching to form each into a long, thin rope. If the dough resists shaping, let rest for 5 minutes and try again. Braid the ropes, starting from the center and working to one end. This produces a loaf with a more uniform thickness than when braided from end to end.
7. Allow the bread to rest and rise on the prepared cookie sheet for 1 hour and 20 minutes, if coming from the refrigerator. If freshly made and unrefrigerated, rest for just 40 minutes.
8. **Preheat the oven to 350 degrees: 5 minutes for a regular baking sheet, 20 minutes for a stone baking sheet.** Brush the loaf with the egg wash and sprinkle with your choice of seeds.
9. Bake near the center of the oven for about 25 minutes. If you have halved or doubled the recipe, then adjust the baking time for the smaller or larger loaf. The bread is done when golden brown, and the braids near the center of the loaf offer resistance to pressure. Due to the fat in the dough, challah will not form a hard, crackling crust.
10. Allow to cool before slicing and eating.