

Cinnamon Swirl Bread

From America's Test Kitchen episode: *Sunday Brunch*.

Makes 2 loaves

To achieve the proper dough consistency, make sure to weigh your ingredients. The dough will appear very wet and sticky until the final few minutes of kneading; do not be tempted to add supplemental flour.

INGREDIENTS

DOUGH

- 8** tablespoons unsalted butter
- 3 3/4** cups (20 2/3 ounces) bread flour, plus extra for work surface
- 3/4** cup (2 3/4 ounces) nonfat dry milk powder
- 1/3** cup (2 1/3 ounces) granulated sugar
- 1** tablespoon instant or rapid-rise yeast
- 1 1/2** cups warm water (110 degrees)
- 1** large egg, lightly beaten
- 1 1/2** teaspoons salt
- 1 1/2** cups (7 1/2 ounces) golden raisins

FILLING

- 1** cup (4 ounces) confectioners' sugar
- 3** tablespoons cinnamon
- 1** teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/2** teaspoon salt

EGG WASH

- 1** large egg, lightly beaten with pinch of salt

INSTRUCTIONS

1. FOR THE DOUGH: Cut butter into 32 pieces and toss with 1 tablespoon flour; set aside to soften while mixing dough. Whisk remaining flour, milk powder, sugar, and yeast together in bowl of stand mixer. Using stand mixer fitted with dough hook, add water and egg and mix on medium-low speed until cohesive mass forms, about 2 minutes, scraping down bowl if necessary. Cover mixing bowl with plastic wrap and let stand for 20 minutes.

2. Adjust oven rack to middle position and place loaf or cake pan on bottom of oven. Remove plastic from mixer bowl, add salt, and mix on medium-low speed until dough is smooth and elastic and clears sides of bowl, 7 to 15 minutes. With mixer running, add butter, few pieces at a time, and continue to knead until butter is fully incorporated and dough is smooth and elastic and clears sides of bowl, 3 to 5 minutes longer. Add raisins and mix until incorporated, 30 to 60 seconds. Transfer dough to large greased bowl and, using bowl scraper or rubber spatula, fold dough over itself by gently lifting and folding edge of dough toward middle. Turn bowl 90 degrees; fold again. Turn bowl and fold dough 6 more times (total of 8 folds). Cover tightly with plastic and transfer to middle rack of oven. Pour 3 cups boiling water into loaf pan in oven, close oven door, and allow dough to rise for 45 minutes.

3. Remove bowl from oven and gently press down on center of dough to deflate. Repeat folding step (making total of 8 folds), re-cover, and return to oven until doubled in volume, about 45 minutes.

4. FOR THE FILLING: Whisk filling ingredients together until well combined; set aside.

5. Grease two 8½ by 4½-inch loaf pans. Transfer dough to lightly floured counter and divide into 2 pieces. Working with 1 piece of dough, pat into rough 6 by 11-inch rectangle. With short side facing you, fold long sides in like business letter to form 3 by 11-inch rectangle. Roll dough away from you into ball. Dust ball with flour and flatten with rolling pin into 7 by 18-inch rectangle with even ¼-inch thickness. Using spray bottle, spray dough lightly with water. Sprinkle half of filling mixture evenly over dough, leaving 1/4-inch border on sides and 3/4-inch border on top and bottom; spray filling lightly with water. (Filling should be speckled with

water over entire surface.) With short side facing you, roll dough away from you into firm cylinder. Turn loaf seam side up and pinch closed; pinch ends closed. Dust loaf lightly on all sides with flour and let rest for 10 minutes. Repeat with second ball of dough and remaining filling.

6. Working with 1 loaf at a time, use bench scraper to cut loaf in half lengthwise; turn halves so cut sides are facing up. Gently stretch each half into 14-inch length. Line up pieces of dough and pinch 2 ends of strips together. Take piece on left and lay over piece on right. Repeat, keeping cut side up, until pieces of dough are tightly twisted. Pinch ends together. Transfer loaf, cut side up, to prepared loaf pan; push any exposed raisins into seams of braid. Repeat with second loaf. Cover loaves loosely with plastic, return to oven, and allow to rise for 45 minutes. Remove loaves and water pan from oven; heat oven to 350 degrees. Allow loaves to rise at room temperature until almost doubled in size, about 45 minutes longer (top of loaves should rise about 1 inch over lip of pan).

7. Brush loaves with egg mixture. Bake until crust is well browned, about 25 minutes. Reduce oven temperature to 325 degrees, tent loaves with aluminum foil, and continue to bake until internal temperature registers 200 degrees, 15 to 25 minutes longer.

8. Transfer pans to wire rack and let cool for 5 minutes. Remove loaves from pans, return to rack, and cool to room temperature before slicing, about 2 hours.

TO MAKE AHEAD: Baked and cooled loaves can be wrapped in double layer of plastic and stored at room temperature for 2 days. To freeze bread for up to 1 month, wrap it with additional layer of foil.

TECHNIQUE

WEAVING A TIGHT CINNAMON SWIRL BREAD, RUSSIAN-STYLE

The benefit of a Russian braid—other than good looks—is that it solves the gapping that plagues swirl breads. The twisted shape tightly seals the pieces of dough together while providing plenty of escape routes for the excess air that would otherwise compress the dough and create tunnels in the loaf.

CUT LENGTHWISE

Using bench scraper or sharp chef's knife, cut filled dough in half lengthwise. Turn halves so cut sides are facing up.



STRETCH

With cut sides up, stretch each half into 14-inch length.



FOLD LEFT OVER RIGHT

Pinch 2 ends of strips together. To braid, take left strip of dough and lay it over right strip of dough.



REPEAT AND PINCH

Repeat braiding, keeping cut sides facing up, until pieces are tightly twisted. Pinch ends together.



TECHNIQUE

ANATOMY OF A FAILED LOAF

Cinnamon swirl bread's inherent predicament: The dough and the filling don't mix. But the problems don't stop there.

BREAD GAPS Because the dough and filling don't readily bind, air and steam get trapped in the spiral, compressing the bread and creating significant gaps.



FILLING RUNS The typical filling made with granulated sugar has no sticking power and puddles at the bottom of the bread.

LOAF SPRINGS A LEAK Thanks to the gaps and the weight of the filling, the seam of the loaf is compromised, so the filling spills out.

TECHNIQUE

MAKING A STICKY FILLING THAT STICKS

The cinnamon sugar swirl isn't just for flavor; it needs to function as an adhesive between the pieces of dough. Here's how we altered the typical formula.

POWDERED SUGAR

Confectioners' sugar contains cornstarch that thickens up the filling and makes it less runny.



LOTS OF CINNAMON

Cinnamon contains starches that thicken the filling and help it form a sticky paste.



SPRITZ OF WATER

Lightly misting the dough before and after adding the filling creates extra adhesiveness.



TECHNIQUE

A BETTER BASE FOR CINNAMON SWIRL BREAD

The usual base for cinnamon swirl bread is American sandwich bread, but we looked to a different source: shokupan, Japan's version of the same loaf.

Shokupan relies on lots of fat, high-protein flour, and thorough kneading to create a crumb that's feathery light yet still strong enough to support a gooey cinnamon filling.

JAPANESE SHOKUPAN



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