

Beth Spira's Challah Recipe

Ingredients

1 ½ cups warm water
1/3 cup vegetable oil
1 tablespoon yeast
1/8 teaspoon kosher salt (any salt will be fine though)
5 large egg yolks
1 tablespoon vanilla
4 ½ cups bread flour (highly recommend King Arthur)
½ cup bread flour (in addition to the 4 ½ cups)
½ cup brown sugar
1 teaspoon white sugar (superfine if you have it)
1 egg beaten
¾ cup chocolate chips (parve or dairy)

1. Measure out all the ingredients in separate bowls.
2. Place the water, yeast and 1 teaspoon of white sugar into a large bowl and stir to combine. Let stand 10 minutes until you see a thin frothy layer across the top. This means that the yeast is active and ready to use. (If you do not see this or if your yeast won't dissolve, it has likely expired, and you'll need to purchase new yeast and start again.)
3. In a separate bowl mix together the 4 ½ cups flour, brown sugar and salt.
4. In another separate bowl mix together the oil, egg yolks and vanilla.
5. First add the liquid ingredients to the large bowl with the yeast and water, then pour in the flour mixture. Mix together with your hands until you have a ball of dough.
6. Use the 1/2 cup of flour to mix into the dough (a bit at a time) if the dough ball seems too sticky, reserving some for the kneading surface to keep the dough from sticking to it.
7. Find a space to knead the dough on. Sprinkle some flour on the surface to make sure the dough doesn't stick while kneading it.
8. Remove the ball of dough from the bowl and put onto the surface and knead it for 10 minutes. (Add a bit more flour to the kneading surface as necessary to keep the dough from sticking.) Dough should become smooth.
9. Place dough into a large bowl that has been lightly greased with vegetable oil.
10. If you have a range, turn your oven on to 400 degrees. Cover bowl with a damp warm towel and place covered bowl on **top of the range** – not inside the oven! – for 1 ½ hours. This makes sure the dough can stay warm enough to rise. If you have a wall oven, find a warm spot in your kitchen (but not hot enough to start baking the dough) to let the dough rise.
11. After the dough has risen for 1 ½ hours place it back on the lightly floured surface. Pull a small (about the size of a walnut or large olive) piece of dough from the large ball, say the blessing (“baruch ata Adonai eloheinu melech haolam asher kidshanu bemitzvotav vetzivanu lehafrih challah”) and set the piece aside. (This is the “challah” – see below.)

12. Divide the large ball into two equal parts. Take the two equal parts and divide each into three equal parts. All together you should now have six roughly equal separated parts of the dough (not counting the challah).
13. Take 3 parts of the dough and roll into long strands to use for braiding. Do this twice so that you can braid two separate challot.
14. If you would like to make a chocolate chip challah take your $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of chocolate chips and fold them into each strand of dough before braiding the challah.
15. After you have braided the two challot place them on a large baking sheet covered in parchment paper.
16. Put a clean towel over the two loaves and leave to rise again for 30 minutes. Place the small separated piece of dough on foil in the oven and preheat your oven (or reset the temperature) to 350 degrees. (Don't worry, the goal is to burn that piece.)
17. Take the beaten egg and brush the top of each loaf.
18. Place the two loaves in the oven at 350 degrees and bake for 30 minutes.
19. Take out right away and allow to cool on a rack.

What are the origins of the word Challah?

The word *Challah* is first mentioned in the Torah in the verse where G-d says to the Jewish people:

When you come to the Land to which I bring you, it shall be that when you will eat of the bread of the Land, you shall set aside a challah (portion) for Gd. (Numbers 15: 18-19).

The word Challah originally referred to the portion of the bread that was set aside and then burned before baking. So while the original meaning referred to the portion of dough set aside, we have now come to refer to the entire bread as challah.

Do people still set aside a small amount of challah dough and burn it before baking?

Yes, and while originally that dough was given to a *Kohen or temple priest*, whose duty was to fulfill the commandment to burn the dough before cooking, many people today continue the custom by doing it themselves, since the temple priests no longer exist. This act of burning a small portion of dough has come to represent the belief that our good fortune as symbolized by the challah we bake is not for us to enjoy separate from the acknowledgment of the divine. If we have wisdom, love, success, money or good health, our setting aside a portion of dough is a meaningful way to acknowledge our blessings and turn the act of baking challah into an act with Divine purpose.

Why two challot?

On Shabbat and Festivals two loaves of bread are placed on the table, because they represent the double portion of manna that fell from the sky on the day preceding the Shabbat and Festivals and fed the Jewish people when they wandered in the desert for 40 years after leaving Egypt. (No manna was given or gathered on Shabbat and the Festivals themselves.)

Why cover the challah?

There are two popular explanations for this custom. Since the *Kiddush*, the blessing over the wine, precedes the *Motzi*, the blessing over the challah which typically starts a meal, we cover the challah so that it should not feel slighted by the attention paid to the wine. Jewish literature often likens Shabbat to a bride, Just as the veil of a bride is lifted under the chuppah (wedding canopy), the challah is uncovered prior to the recitation of the blessing.

See below for some fun specialty challah recipes and add ins:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9OMJUfv_Ag
- <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/30-amazing-challah-recipes/>
- <https://sotov.life/food-drink/7-unique-challah-recipes-youve-gotta-try/>