

CLASSIC CHALLAH

Liz: A while back, I joined baker and food writer Shannon Sarna for a challah-baking session in her home. Shannon does things to challah I've never even dreamed of, like king cake challah for Mardi Gras, candy-stuffed challah for Halloween, challah filled with PB&J. We decided to play with the idea of a (more) Ashkenazi challah, as if that were necessary. Shannon suggested a two-tone challah, and I loved it. The results were promising, so I went home, tested a number of different variations, and worked on developing the formula for the marble rye challah you'll find here.

This recipe calls for making separate traditional challah dough and a darker, richer rye dough, then intertwining them into a single marbled loaf. If you're a challah novice, or just looking to bake something simple, start with the classic challah recipe below. Once you've mastered the basics, feel free to take on the second part of the recipe (page 92) and make the extraordinary marble loaf. The rye dough is tougher and a bit harder to roll out and braid, so you'll want to have some experience before you begin. It also tastes great when baked on its own. Wherever you are in your challah journey, it'll be delicious. Note that making challah, or any bread, requires patience and waiting at various stages, and the addition of the marble rye twist requires some additional time and effort. Slightly stale challah also makes incredible French toast.

MAKES 2 MEDIUM CLASSIC LOAVES

2 (¼-ounce) packets active dry yeast (4½ teaspoons)
2/3 cup plus 2 tablespoons sugar
1/3 cup lukewarm water
1 cup boiling water
¼ cup vegetable oil or grapeseed oil
1½ teaspoons kosher salt
4 large eggs, lightly beaten
5 to 6 cups all-purpose or bread flour, plus more as needed
Sesame seeds or poppy seeds, for sprinkling (optional)

1. If making the marble loaf, start by making the Marble Rye Twist (page 92). Then in a small bowl, combine the yeast, 2 tablespoons of the sugar, and the lukewarm water. Stir and set aside. In a large bowl or in the bowl of a stand mixer, combine the remaining 2/3 cup sugar, the boiling water, oil, and salt. Stir until the sugar has dissolved. Add the beaten eggs (reserve about 1 tablespoon of the eggs for coating the loaves at the end), pour in the yeast mixture, and stir to combine.
2. Add the flour 1 cup at a time. Start by stirring in the flour with a fork, then switch to kneading by hand or using the stand mixer fitted with the dough hook. Don't be afraid to add more flour.

Excerpted from the book THE GEFILTE MANIFESTO by Jeffrey Yoskowitz & Liz Alpern. Copyright © 2016 by Gefilte Manifesto LLC. Reprinted with permission from Flatiron Books. All rights reserved. Photography by Lauren Volo.

You do not want sticky dough. Knead the dough until it is soft and pliable and bounces back when you poke it with your finger, about 12 minutes if kneading by hand. If you're using a stand mixer, you'll want to let it run on speed one or two until it forms a ball of dough and pulls off the sides of the bowl, about 7 minutes.

3. Transfer the dough to a clean bowl and cover with a kitchen towel or plastic wrap. Let rise in a warm place for at least 2 hours, or until the dough has doubled in size. Do not rush this first rising. Leave the dough for as long as it takes to double in size (up to 4 hours, if necessary).

4. When the dough has risen, punch it down and lightly knead it on a floured surface. Separate the dough into 12 pieces about the size of golf balls. Roll each piece into a ball and then roll each ball into a long rope. Each rope should be about 8 inches long.

5. Braid the ropes into two large challahs using the six-braid method (see page 91). Place the braided loaves on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Using a pastry brush or your fingers, coat each loaf with the reserved egg and sprinkle with sesame or poppy seeds if you like. Set aside to rise for 45 minutes, until they are puffy.

6. Preheat the oven to 350°F. Bake the challah for 30 minutes, moving the loaves from the top rack to the bottom rack halfway through the baking time. At 30 minutes, check the challah by (carefully) lifting each one up and tapping the bottom with a knuckle. If it sounds hollow and the outside of the challah is a brownish color, it's ready. If it sounds completely solid or is still pale in color or doughy in the places where the braids meet, bake for 5 to 10 minutes more and test again.

7. Remove the loaves from the oven and let cool on a wire rack. Serve warm or at room temperature. Challah freezes well and can be thawed and reheated before serving.