

Pumpkin Challah

A twist on the traditional Jewish bread

Prep: 30 min

Cook: 50 min

Rising: 4 hours

Total: 1 hour 20 min

Servings: 12 servings (makes one large loaf)

Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon rapid-rise yeast (or 5 teaspoons active dry, or 3 tablespoons fresh)
- 1/2 cup luke-warm water
- 1 cup pumpkin puree (8 oz.)
- 3 eggs, plus 1 for brushing the bread
- 3 oz. butter, melted and cooled (6 tablespoons)
- 1/3 cup sugar
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 5 cups all purpose or bread flour
- optional: 1 tablespoon poppy or sesame seeds, for sprinkling

Instructions:

1. In a large bowl, whisk together the yeast, water, pumpkin, eggs, butter, sugar and salt. (If using rapid rise yeast, sprinkle the yeast over the water and let stand 10 minutes before adding the other ingredients.) Stir in the flour a cup at a time, until a shaggy dough forms. Turn out onto a lightly floured surface and knead for about 10 minutes, adding just enough flour to keep the dough from sticking to your hands and the surface, until the dough feels smooth and springy. Place in a lightly oiled bowl or container, cover with a lid or plastic wrap, and let rise in a warm place until doubled in bulk, about 2 hours.
2. Turn the dough out onto a lightly floured surface and gently press out the air bubbles. Divide the dough into 6 equal portions (they will weigh about 8 ounces each). Tuck the edges under to form loose rounds. Cover loosely with plastic wrap or a large plastic bag and let them rest for 10 minutes to relax the glutens and make them easier to shape. Roll them into approximately 14-inch ropes. Connect the ropes at the far end, with the loose ends closest to you. Number the strands 1-6.

3. A) Bring strand 6 over strand 1. Strand 5 is now the new strand 6, and the old 6 is the new 1.
4. B) Begin to braid the dough in the following pattern:
5. 2 over 6
6. 1 over 3
7. 5 over 1
8. 6 over 4
9. C) Repeat this pattern until you have used up all the dough.
10. D) Pinch the ends together, and tuck them under the loaf.
11. Whew! Now lift the loaf onto a parchmented baking sheet, put the whole thing in a large plastic bag, and let rise for about 30 minutes.
12. Preheat the oven to 400° with a shelf on the lowest rack. Brush the loaf with the beaten egg, and let rise another 15 minutes in the bag. Brush the loaf a second time, return to the bag, and let rise another 15 minutes or so. The bread should be roughly doubled in size, and should hold the indentation of your finger when pressed lightly. (Optionally sprinkle the top with poppy or sesame seeds.)
13. Place the loaf in the oven and bake for 10 minutes. Reduce the temperature to 325° and bake for another 20 minutes. Rotate the loaf, and bake another 15 or 20 minutes, for a total baking time of 45-50 minutes. The bread should be a rich brown, sound hollow when thumped on the underside, and an instant read thermometer should register at least 195° when inserted in the center.
14. Remove the pan from the oven and let the bread cool completely, 1-2 hours, before enjoying.