How to Make Braided Bread

How to bake challah, sweet breads, stuffed breads and more

Recipes and Techniques

The Prepared Pantry
How to Make Braided Bread

It’s so fun to braid bread—and it’s fun to impress your friends with the results.

And it’s easy to braid bread. If you can make bread, you can braid bread.

Over the years, we’ve acquired some really great recipes—maybe some of our favorite bread recipes. We’ll show you just how easy it is and share these recipes with you.

You can braid bread to make challah which is usually egg and butter rich. You can also make stuffed bread. The chocolate braided bread and the New York bagel bread are absolutely outstanding.

Happy baking!

Dennis & MerriAnn Weaver & Company
# How to Make Braided Bread

## Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table of Contents</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Braid Bread</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to Bake Easy Challah</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mini Challah Loaves</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweet Chocolate Braided Bread</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New York Bagel Bread</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuffed Bread: Italian Filled Bread</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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How to Braid Bread

You can braid nearly any bread—including your favorite recipe. We often grab a mix—that makes it even easier.

Follow the package directions. You can set your bread machine to the dough cycle and mix the bread in the machine or you can use your stand-type mixer. If the resulting dough is too sticky to handle, knead in just a bit of extra flour.

For challah, consider our Sally Lunn Bread Mix. This is a rich, fine textured bread much like challah.

Place the bread dough in a greased bowl, cover, and let rise until doubled—about 1 1/2 hours.

Prepare a large baking sheet by greasing and sprinkling with cornmeal. Use a lighter colored sheet to help keep the bottom from burning.

Once raised, use a knife to divide the dough into three equal pieces (or four if you choose to make a four-braid bread). Roll the pieces under the palms of your hands into three long ropes as shown. You may need to let each rest for five to ten minutes to allow the dough to relax to get the proper shape. Using this mix, you should have three ropes nearly 24-inches long. If you want the loaf to be larger in the center and less rectangular shaped, make the ropes thicker in the middle and tapered toward the ends.

Braid the three ropes as shown in a common three strand braid just as if you were braiding pigtails. (Some people find it easier to create a symmetrical shape if they start braiding from the center.) When you get to the ends, wet them, pinch them together, and tuck them under. You should have a neat, symmetrical loaf when you are through. You can shape the loaf somewhat with your hands. If you don’t like how the loaf looks, simply pull the braids apart and start again.
Place the finished loaf on the prepared sheet. (The formed loaf will be about 12-inches long but after rising and baking, you will have a finished loaf of about 24-inches so be sure to allow room on your sheet for expansion.) Cover the loaf and let rise until doubled, about one hour.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Prepare a glaze by whisking one egg with one-half tablespoon of water. Just before baking and when the loaf has fully doubled, remove the plastic wrap and gently brush glaze over the entire surface of the loaf. Sprinkle the top with poppy seeds or sesame seeds if desired. (Tip the loaf so that you can sprinkle seeds on the sides as well.)

Bake the bread for 20 minutes then cover the bread with a large sheet of aluminum foil to protect the top. Continue baking for another 20 to 30 minutes or until the bread crust is a deep golden brown. The interior of the loaf should register 190 degrees with an insta-read thermometer.

Use a spatula to loosen the bread from the pan and transfer the loaf to a wire rack to cool.

**How to Bake Easy Challah**

While challah is a traditional bread baked for the Jewish Sabbath, it has become popular with everyone, everywhere. It's attractive and has a firm, egg-rich texture that works for dinner, sandwiches, or French toast. It is typically braided with three, four, or six strands of dough. (The braided strands are symbolic of love.)

Challah is really very easy to make, especially from a mix. There is a sense of satisfaction in working the dough by hand and crafting such an attractive bread and it certainly will impress guests.

For this bread, we used one of our bread mixes substituting eggs for part of the water—but you can start your favorite recipe. The package directions called for two cups of water. To make the dough egg-rich, we cracked two large eggs into a measuring cup and added warm water—enough to total two cups. Whisk the water and eggs together with a fork then heat it in the microwave until warm (110 degrees).
Mix the bread according to package instructions using the egg and water mixture. Place the bread dough in a greased bowl, cover, and let rise until doubled—about 1 1/2 hours. An egg-rich bread will take a little longer to rise.

Prepare a large baking sheet by greasing and sprinkling with cornmeal. Use a lighter colored sheet to help keep the bottom from burning.

Once raised, use a knife to divide the dough into three equal pieces (or four if you choose to make a four-braid bread). Roll the pieces under the palms of your hands into three long ropes as shown. You may need to let each rest for five to ten minutes to allow the dough to relax to get the proper shape. Using this mix, you should have three ropes nearly 24-inches long. If you want the loaf to be larger in the center and less rectangular shaped, make the ropes thicker in the middle and tapered toward the ends.

Braid the three ropes as shown in a common three strand braid just as if you were braiding pigtails. (Some people find it easier to create a symmetrical shape if they start braiding from the center.) When you get to the ends, wet them, pinch them together, and tuck them under. You should have a neat, symmetrical loaf when you are through. You can shape the loaf somewhat with your hands. If you don't like how the loaf looks, simply pull the braids apart and start again.

Place the finished loaf on the prepared sheet. (The formed loaf will be about 12-inches long but after rising and baking, you will have a finished loaf of about 24-inches so be sure to allow room on your sheet for expansion.) Cover the loaf and let rise until doubled, about one hour.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

Prepare a glaze by whisking one egg with one-half tablespoon of water. Just before baking and when the loaf has fully doubled, remove the plastic wrap and gently brush glaze over the entire surface of the loaf. Sprinkle the top with poppy seeds or sesame seeds as desired. (Tip the loaf so that you can sprinkle seeds on the sides as well.)

Bake the bread for 20 minutes then cover the bread with a large sheet of aluminum foil to protect the top. Continue baking for another 20 to 30 minutes or until the bread crust is a deep golden brown. The interior of the loaf should register 190 degrees with an insta-read thermometer.

Use an egg turner to loosen the bread from the pan and transfer the loaf to a wire rack to cool.
Mini Challah Loaves

This recipe is different—the dough is made in two stages: a sponge and then the final dough. Additionally, the bread is made in loaf pans, not freestanding. The sponge is merely a very wet dough that the yeast can percolate in. After the yeast grows, the rest of the flour is added for a dough of conventional consistency.

This makes a gorgeous lemon colored bread and the egg wash makes the braided bread brown beautifully on top.

For the sponge

1 7 gram packet active dry yeast
1 cup warm water
3 tablespoons honey
1 cup all bread flour

1. Combine yeast and warm water in a medium bowl. Stir in honey and flour to form a wet dough of batter consistency.
2. Cover the dough with plastic film and allow it to rise in a warm place for 20 to 30 minutes or until bubbles begin to form.

For the dough

2 large eggs
1 large egg yolk
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 1/2 teaspoons salt
2 1/2 cups bread flour
1/2 teaspoon dough conditioner (optional)

Directions

1. Whisk the eggs, egg yolk, oil and salt together.
2. Add the flour and dough conditioner to the sponge mixture. Add the egg mixture. Mix well until the eggs are mixed in.
3. Knead the dough until it forms a smooth ball. Place dough in an oiled bowl and turn to cover top with oil. Cover with plastic film and let it rise at room temp for one more hour or until doubled.
1. Turn the dough onto a lightly oiled or floured surface. Divide dough into four balls. Divide each ball into three balls and roll into ropes about six inches long.
2. Braid the ropes, pinching the ends together. Place in greased loaf pans (four 3 x 5 1/2-inch pans). Cover and let the bread rise in the pans until doubled in size and soft and puffy.
3. Whisk an egg, an egg yolk, and one tablespoon warm water together to make an egg wash and brush it over the loaves gently. Immediately bake at 350 degrees for 15 minutes or until done. The internal temperature of the bread should reach 190 degrees.

*Baker's notes:* The braid does not need to be perfect, it will all even out as it rises and bakes.

**Sweet Chocolate Braided Bread**

For this recipe, we made a chocolate dough and a chocolate cream cheese filling. After baking, we drizzled the bread with a chocolate cream cheese glaze. This is an absolutely scrumptious chocolate bread—maybe our best chocolate bread ever.

Use the directions for braiding bread found elsewhere in this section.

This recipe can be doubled.

**Ingredients**

- 3 to 3 1/2 cups bread flour
- 1 packet instant active dry yeast
- 3/4 cup water, heated to 110 degrees
- 1/3 cup brown sugar
- 1/3 cup cocoa
- 4 tablespoons butter
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 large egg at room temperature

**For the filling**

- 5 ounces cream cheese
- 1 ounce semi-sweet baking chocolate, melted
- 3 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour
1 egg yolk
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract
1/8 teaspoon nutmeg

Chocolate glaze directions follows.

Directions

1. Mix about one cup of the flour, the yeast, and the heated water until smooth. This will hydrate the instant yeast. If you are using other than instant yeast, hydrate the yeast separately.
2. Add the brown sugar, cocoa, butter, salt, and egg and mix. Add enough of the remaining bread flour to make a soft but not tacky dough. Knead until the gluten is developed, about four minutes with a stand-type mixer at medium speed. Set the dough in a greased bowl, cover, and let it stand until doubled, about one hour.
3. To make the filling, beat the cream cheese until soft and smooth. Add the melted chocolate while it is still hot and mix until smooth. Add the sugar, flour, egg yolk, vanilla, and nutmeg and mix until smooth.
4. Once the dough has risen, use a knife to divide the dough into three equal pieces. Roll the dough pieces with a rolling pin to rectangles 15 inches by 5 inches. Spread one-third of the filling down the center of each leaving a one-inch border with no filling. Roll the rectangle into fifteen-inch long ropes with the filling inside. Pinch any seams together and roll the ropes with your hands on the counter until smooth.
5. Braid the three ropes as if you were braiding pigtails. (Some people find it easier to create a symmetrical shape if they start braiding from the center.) When you get to the ends, wet them, pinch them together, and tuck them under. You should have a neat, symmetrical loaf when you are through. You can shape the loaf somewhat with your hands. If you don't like how the loaf looks, simply pull the braids apart and start again. Prepare a large baking sheet by greasing it and sprinkling it with cornmeal. Place the loaf on the pan, cover the loaf, and let it rise until doubled, about one hour.
6. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Bake the bread for 20 minutes then cover the bread with a large sheet of aluminum foil and bake for another ten to fifteen minutes to until done. The bread should “thump” when tapped on the bottom and the interior of the loaf should register 190 degrees with an insta-read thermometer. Let the bread cool on a wire rack.
7. While the bread is cooling, make the glaze. With a hand-held mixer, beat one ounce cream cheese with one teaspoon vanilla. Add 1 1/2 cups powdered sugar and 2 tablespoons cocoa with enough warm water to make a glaze of drizzling consistency. Drizzle the chocolate glaze generously over the bread.
**Baker's notes:** To quickly bring an egg to room temperature, place it in a cup of warm water.

**New York Bagel Bread**

You can make wonderful bagel bread with this recipe. While we made this bread with a bread machine mix, you can use a recipe of your own. Select a lean bread recipe, that is, a recipe that calls for no eggs and a minimum amount of oil or butter. The bread should not be sweet so choose a recipe with minimal sugar.

**Directions:**

Mix the dough according to recipe directions but use only two tablespoons of oil—either olive or vegetable oil. If the dough is too wet to handle, add another tablespoon or two of flour. Grease a large bowl. Remove the dough to the bowl and turn once to coat both sides. Cover and let rise until doubled, usually over an hour.

Prepare a large cookie or baking sheet by greasing and sprinkling with cornmeal. The sheet should be at least 20 inches long.

Turn the risen dough out onto a countertop. Divide the dough with a sharp knife into two parts, one piece twice as large as the other. Divide both the larger and smaller piece into three equals pieces so that you have six pieces of dough. Roll the pieces on the counter under your palms to form ropes about an inch in diameter. The larger ropes should be 18 to 20 inches long; the smaller ropes about 16 inches.

Braid the longer ropes together and the smaller ropes together in three strand braids as shown. Pinch the ends together to keep the braids from unraveling as the dough rises. Place the larger braid on the sheet and center the smaller braid on top of the larger. Cover with plastic and let rise until well doubled and very puffy, about another hour.
Place two tablespoons water and two tablespoons of oil in a bowl. Chop one medium onion and add it to the oil and water mixture. Add 2 1/2 tablespoons poppy seeds and 1/4 teaspoon garlic powder to the mixture. Stir and let sit while the dough rises.

In a cup, create an egg wash by mixing one egg yolk with one tablespoon water and stirring with a fork or whisk until well mixed.

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Once the dough has risen, brush the loaf with the egg wash to coat. Spoon the topping on the loaf as shown. Sprinkle the loaf with course salt and place the bread in the oven.

Bake the loaf for 30 minutes at 375 degrees. Turn the temperature down to 350 degrees and loosely cover the top of the loaf with aluminum foil to keep from burning the topping. Bake for another 15 minutes. Remove the loaf from the oven and check for doneness. If you have a thermometer, the center of the loaf should test 200 degrees. Turn the oven off and place the loaf back in the oven for five minutes without the aluminum foil cover. The last five minutes in the oven will develop a thicker crust. Cool on a wire rack before slicing.

**Stuffed Bread: Italian Filled Bread**

Think pizza in a loaf. You can stuff this attractive braided bread with almost anything that you would put on a pizza. We’ll show you how to make one of our favorites but make whatever suits your fancy.

**Stuffed Tuscany Tomato Basil Bread**

The convenient way to make this bread is with our Tuscany Tomato Basil Bread Mix, but you can use your favorite plain white bread recipe. If you are making this bread from a recipe, use a two loaf recipe and mix according to directions. Add two tablespoon dried crushed basil during the mixing. (If you are making this from our mix, follow the directions but set the dried tomatoes aside and use slightly less than the two cups of water called for. The dried tomatoes soak up some water so using less than the directions call for is appropriate.) Place the bread dough in an oiled bowl, turn once, and cover to let rise until doubled.

Use the following recipe for the filling. Stuffed bread recipes lend themselves to customization so add or substitute ingredients according to your taste.
Stuffed Tuscany Tomato Basil Bread Filling (for two loaves)

1 cup sliced sun dried tomatoes (one packet if you are using our mix)
1 six ounce can of pitted black olives, drained and chopped or 1/2 pound Italian sausage, sautéed
1/2 medium sized onion, diced or 1/2 red or green bell pepper, diced
1/2 tablespoon crushed oregano, Italian seasonings, or other seasonings of choice
1/4 teaspoon pepper
2 cups grated mozzarella cheese
2 tablespoons grated cheese for topping

Directions:

Grease a baking sheet and sprinkle it with cornmeal or semolina flour.

1. Place the dried tomatoes in a bowl with barely enough water to cover. Cover with plastic and microwave for one minute on high heat. Let the tomatoes steep in the hot water for several minutes. Drain the tomatoes and pat dry with a paper towel.

2. Mix all the filling ingredients together in a large bowl.

3. Once the dough has risen, divide it into two equal parts for two loaves. Roll one part into a rectangle about 12 inches by 15 inches. Slice the dough into one inch wide fringed ribbons as shown in the picture leaving the center one-third unsliced. Make sure there is an equal number of slices on each side. Place half the filling on the dough center. Fold up the bottom edge one inch and then beginning folding the ribbons over the filling, lapping them alternately as shown. When you near the top, fold the top one inch down along with two of the ribbon pieces. Finish folding over the ribbon pieces. Cup the ends of the loaf in your palms and compress the loaf into an oblong, well-shaped loaf. Put the loaf on the prepared pan, and cover with plastic wrap. Repeat with the other loaf. Let the loaves rise until doubled, about an hour in a warm kitchen.
4. Preheat the oven to 350 degrees.

5. Whisk one egg with one tablespoon water. Just before baking, brush the top of the loaves with the egg wash.

6. Bake for thirty minutes or until done. As soon as you remove the bread from the oven, sprinkle the tops with the remaining grated cheese so that it will partially melt on the loaves. If need be, return the loaves to the oven for a minute. Cool the bread on wire racks.

Serve hot. Refrigerate any leftovers. This bread can also be frozen.