

Braided Challah (2 Loaves)

4 c all-purpose flour	1 t salt
1T "Rapid Rise" Instant Yeast (1 pkt)*	2 whole eggs, beaten, room temp
6T sugar or honey (or combo)	½c each milk/water
1 egg yolk beaten with 1T water	3T butter, room temp

(See note on yeast.) Mix 3c of the flour with the yeast and salt in a large bowl. In a smaller bowl, microwave the milk, water, butter and sugar/honey together for 30 seconds, or until the butter is melted. Stir to dissolve the sugar. Test that the mixture feels very warm to the touch, but not hot. Add this mixture to the flour along with the 2 whole eggs. Stir vigorously with a wooden spoon until well blended and stretchy.

Slowly stir in some of the remaining cup of flour until it's too stiff to stir. Turn the dough out onto a floured cutting board. Add the remainder of the flour by kneading it in. Knead for about 5-10 min. until you have a smooth, springy dough, adding only enough additional flour to your board to keep the dough from sticking. Shape the dough into a ball. Pour about 2T oil into the same large bowl, and place the dough back in turning to coat with the oil.

Cover with plastic wrap or drape a cloth over it and place in a warm spot. *If you used "Active Dry Yeast," let dough rise about 45 minutes, until it looks roughly double in size. If you used "Rapid Rise Yeast," let dough rest for about 15 minutes.

After the dough has risen or rested, gently punch it down to deflate it. Again turn out the dough onto a floured board. Cut dough in half gently, and place one half back in the bowl, covering it to keep it moist.

Divide the dough into three equal pieces. Using as little flour as possible, roll each piece into a rope about 12 inches long. Place the three ropes next to, but not touching each other. Pinch them together at the top then braid the three ropes together, pinching at the bottom. Place the braid onto a parchment lined cookie sheet, tucking the pinched edges under to neaten the ends. Repeat with the other pieces, and place the second braid next to the first.

Brush the braids with the egg yolk mix, and let rise in a warm place until almost doubled in size. Preheat your oven to 375. When the oven is ready, again brush the loaves with egg wash, and place on the second from the bottom shelf of the hot oven.

Bake for 15 minutes. Lower the temperature to 350, and bake for an additional 15 minutes, until a golden brown color. Remove from the oven and tap the bottom of a loaf to test that it sounds sort of hollow. (This is very subjective!) If it sounds dense, bake for an additional 5 minutes. Remove the loaves from the pan, and allow them to rest on a cooling rack until no longer hot. (Be patient! If you cut it while hot, you'll ruin the texture.)

Mazel tov! (Good luck!)

If using "Active Dry Yeast": In a large bowl, mix the yeast with ¼c warm water and 1t of sugar. Let sit for 10 minutes till foamy. Proceed with recipe.