



THE WAY THE COOKIE CRUMBLES

A FOOD BLOG

Whole Wheat Challah (adapted slightly from Peter Reinhart's *Whole Grain Breads*)

You can do more complicated braids with this if you prefer. Just do an internet search for instructions for 4-, 5-, and 6-strand braids.

Soaker:

1¾ cups (8 ounces) whole wheat flour, preferably fine grind
½ teaspoon salt
¾ cup water

Biga:

1¾ cups (8 ounces) whole wheat flour, preferably fine grind
¼ teaspoon instant yeast
½ cup water
2 tablespoons vegetable oil
1 large egg
4 large egg yolks

Final dough:

the soaker
the biga
7 tablespoons (2 ounces) whole wheat flour, plus more for adjustments
¾ teaspoon salt
2¼ teaspoons instant yeast
2 tablespoons sugar or brown sugar, or 1½ tablespoons honey or agave nectar
2 tablespoons vegetable oil

Toppings:

1 egg
1 tablespoon water
pinch salt
poppy seeds or sesame seeds (optional)

1. For the soaker: In a medium mixing bowl, mix all of the ingredients together. Cover and leave at room temperature for 12 to 24 hours, or refrigerate for up to 3 days. If the dough is refrigerated, leave it at room temperature for 2 hours before mixing the final dough.
2. For the biga: In a medium mixing bowl, mix all of the ingredients together. Knead for 2 minutes; the dough will feel very tacky. Let the dough rest for 5 minutes, then knead for 1 minute. Cover and refrigerate for at least 8 hours and up to 3 days. Leave it at room temperature for 2 hours before mixing the final dough.
3. For the final dough: Cut the soaker and biga into about 12 smaller pieces. Put the pieces in the bowl of a standing mixer fitted with the dough hook along with the 7 tablespoons flour, the salt, instant yeast, sugar, and oil. (Or mix by hand in a large bowl.) Mix on slow speed for about 1 minute, until the dough comes together, then increase the speed to medium-high and continue mixing and kneading for 6 minutes, adding flour if necessary, until the dough is soft and tacky, but not sticky. (Or knead by hand for 6-8 minutes.) Let the dough

rest for 5 minutes, then resume kneading for 1 minute. Form the dough into a ball and place it in a greased bowl. Cover and let rise at room temperature for 45 to 60 minutes, until it is about 1½ times its original size.

4. Gently transfer the dough to a lightly floured work surface. Divide the dough into 6 evenly sized pieces for 2 smaller loaves or 3 evenly sized pieces for 1 large loaf. Roll each portion of dough into a rope about 10 inches long, letting the dough rest for 5 minutes if it's very elastic. Braid the ropes.

5. Place the braid(s) on a sheet pan lined with parchment paper or a silicone mat. To make the egg wash, whisk the egg, water, and salt (listed above in Toppings) together. Brush the braids with the egg wash, cover, and let rise at room temperature for 30 minutes.

6. Brush the dough with the egg wash again, then top with poppy seeds or sesame seeds, if using. Leave the dough uncovered and let rise for 15 more minutes. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

7. Place the challah on the middle shelf, reduce the heat to 325 degrees, and bake for 20 minutes. Rotate the loaf 180 degrees and bake for another 20 minutes. Check the bread and rotate again if it is baking unevenly. Continue baking for an additional 10 to 15 minutes, until the bread is a rich brown all around, sounds hollow when thumped on the bottom, and registers at least 195 degrees at the center.

8. Transfer the bread to a cooling rack and let it cool for at least 1 hour before serving.