

MAKES
2
LARGE LOAVES

CHALLAH

TOTAL
3 HOURS
ACTIVE
30 MINUTES

1½ cups water (1 1/2)
½ teaspoon ground turmeric (1/2)
½ cup refined coconut oil (1/2)
½ cup plus 1 tablespoon sugar (1/2)
½ cup warm water (1/3)
2½ tablespoons active dry yeast (2 1/2)
2 very overripe bananas
1 tablespoon salt
7 cups all-purpose flour, plus extra
for kneading
2 tablespoons pure maple syrup
2 tablespoons unsweetened almond
milk (or your favorite nondairy
milk)
2 teaspoons poppy seeds

So fluffy and doughy. So cuddly and perfect that it even looks like a hug. Challah is such an inviting golden amber with gorgeous yolky yellow poking through. This recipe satisfies every nook and cranny of my memory growing up in Brooklyn, eating challah fresh from the bakery. The original idea to use bananas was actually from an old user-submitted recipe on my website, but it's undergone a million alterations in the past decade or so. The result is crusty and toasty on the outside and buttery and soft inside, with that beautiful yolky-yellow crumb.

Combine the water and turmeric in a small saucepot. Bring to a boil over medium heat, then immediately turn off the heat. Add the coconut oil and ½ cup of the sugar to the pot, and stir to melt the coconut oil. You want the mixture to cool so that it isn't hot to the touch but is still warm. So, just let it sit while you work on the rest of the recipe.

In a very large mixing bowl, mix the warm water and remaining 1 tablespoon sugar. Sprinkle in the yeast and set aside to get all yeasty.

In a separate bowl, mash the bananas very well, until they appear pureed. The coconut oil mixture should be cooled enough now, so proceed with the recipe.

Add the mashed banana to the yeast bowl, along with the slightly warm coconut oil mixture. Stir just to combine. Add the salt and then the flour, 1 cup at a time. Mix after each addition, and begin to knead with your hands when a dough starts to form. Once all 7 cups have been added, turn out the dough onto a lightly floured counter and begin to knead like crazy for 10 minutes or so, until the dough is nice and smooth. Add up to another ½ cup of flour as needed, until the dough is no longer tacky. Form the dough into a ball.

Wipe out the mixing bowl and lightly grease it. Add the ball of dough, spinning it into the bowl to get it lightly coated in oil. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap or a towel and set aside to rise for about 1½ hours. The dough should double in size.

Grease two rimmed baking sheets and set them aside. Also, make sure you have plenty of space for rolling out the dough ropes to create the braids.

When the dough has doubled, punch it down, knead it lightly, and divide it in half. Take one half and divide it into thirds. Roll each third into a long rope, 18 inches or so.

Now place the three ropes on one baking sheet the long way and braid 'em! Pinch the ends together to form butts. Form the second braided loaf on the other baking sheet.

 *Recipe Continues*

Tip

Instead of egg wash, we're glazing the bread with a mix of maple syrup and nondairy milk. It's a little trick I picked up from the fabulous cookbook *The Voluptuous Vegan*. It doesn't get quite as shiny as an egg wash, but it gets the job done.

Let the loaves rise for about 30 minutes. They should get nice and puffy. No need to cover them for this part.

When the loaves are almost done rising, preheat the oven to 375°F.

Mix the maple syrup and milk in a small bowl. Brush the loaves with the mixture and sprinkle on the poppy seeds. Bake the loaves on separate racks, rotating the pans and swapping racks halfway through, until golden brown, about 40 minutes. If you tap them, they should sound hollow.

Let the challahs cool for 30 minutes or so, and then they are ready to slice and serve! I love them warm and doughy like that.

If you're not serving the challahs immediately, let them cool completely, then wrap in plastic and store at room temperature for up to 2 days.

CHALLAH TOAST

Don't just stop at beautiful slices of challah! Make some challah toast. Here are two ideas, one sweet, one savory. Guests will devour these. (There's also a recipe for Challah French Toast on page 288, so go crazy and make 4 loaves!)

Challah Toast with Apple Butter & Roasted Squash

Store-bought apple butter is fine here—I mean, you made your own challah, what more do people want? Toast thick slices of challah, spread on some apple butter, and top with roasted butternut squash. Finish with some crushed red pepper flakes for a little heat.

Challah Toast with Mushroom Pâté & Caramelized Onion

Toast thick slices of challah, spread on Swanky Mushroom Pâté (page 151), and top with Caramelized Onions (page 368). Finish with something pretty and green, like sliced fresh chives or chopped parsley.