

Honey Challah



[Depending on the size loaves you make, the recipe will make 6 small loaves (good for two people) or four larger loaves (good for four to six people). *And, it freezes very well.*

- 1 ½ - 2 Tablespoon dry yeast
- 1 Tablespoon sugar
- 2 cups lukewarm water, divided
- ¾ cups honey (I use wildflower)
- 1 Tablespoon salt
- 5/8 cup vegetable oil
- 1 egg (large to extra-large)
- 2 ½ pounds high gluten flour*
- 1 Tablespoon oil (for greasing bowl)
- 1 egg, beaten, for egg wash
- **Optional equipment:** I use a yeast thermometer for checking the temperature of the water, and an electronic scale to weigh the flour.

Method:

1. Add the yeast, sugar and 1/2 - 3/4 cup of lukewarm water to a glass and rest for a few minutes until the yeast starts to bloom (bloom is when bubbles form, showing the yeast is still active. [I use a yeast thermometer to make sure that the water is warm enough for the yeast, but not so hot as to kill it.]. I often let the yeast and water mix rise in a tall glass, and confirm that the yeast is active when the bubbles are 1 ½ inches tall or more.]
2. While the yeast and water mix is rising, add the remaining water, honey, salt, oil and egg, into the mixing bowl and mix to incorporate.
3. Add the yeast and water mixture.
4. Add half of the flour and mix until creamy. Add almost all of the rest of the flour (leaving over 1/2 cup or so) and knead with your hands or mixer blades until your dough is smooth and elastic, adding more flour as needed, until the dough is no longer sticky. [Depending on the humidity, you may need to add an additional tablespoon or more until the dough doesn't stick to the mixing bowl when you're kneading it. After you've mixed the entire 2½ pounds, be careful so that you don't add too much.]
5. I use a Kitchenaid© mixer (or any relatively heavy-duty mixer will work), and will use the mixer blade until all but 1 ½ cups of flour is left to incorporate, and then I'll scrape the dough off the mixing blade and replace the mixing paddle with the dough (kneading) hook. The dough hook will knead 'stretch' the dough, which causes the gluten in the flour to start to form, making the dough more 'elastic' and will appear to get 'smoother' in its appearance. [Because no mixer is perfect in kneading, I'll stop the mixer a couple of times, scrape the dough which has risen to the top of the dough hook, so that all the dough has been properly kneaded.
6. I will usually knead the dough for 7 to 10 minutes (when I'm using a mixer.) If you're doing it by hand, you'll feel the dough get more elastic and 'smooth' looking.
7. When you are done kneading, grease the dough with a Tablespoon of oil and cover it with either a towel or plastic wrap (to prevent the dough, as it is rising, from drying out and cracking).
8. Put it in a warm place (I like to put my oven on for about a minute, then turn off the oven, so it gets just a little warm), and then put the bowl in to rise). Leave the dough to rise for 1 1/2-2 hours. It should double in size. [As temperatures in the place where your dough will rise may not be the same, sometimes the dough will double in size in 90 minutes, sometimes in 120 minutes.]
9. Take the dough out of the bowl, press it down, causing most of the air bubbles in the dough to deflate. Let it set for about five minutes, and then cut and braid.
10. When you are done shaping the loaves, I cover with plastic wrap (to prevent the outside of the dough from drying out and cracking, and leave them to rise for 30 - 45 minutes.
11. Brush with egg and topping of your choice. Bake at 350 until golden brown, about 25 minutes.

*You can purchase wheat gluten, which, when added to regular flour – 1 Tbsp. gluten to 1 cup regular flour – will make high gluten/bread flour.

[Note: I will usually bake in one oven, using the Convection setting, with the temperature set at 350 degrees, on two shelves. Although the Convection oven does an OK job, since ¼ pans don't allow for perfect air circulation, when I'm baking on two shelves, I'll open the oven after 12 minutes, the top shelf loaves will be browner, and thus I'll move the top pan after turning it 180 degrees, to the bottom shelf, and the bottom pan, after turning the pan 180 degrees, to the top shelf, to ensure even baking.]