

Holiday Star Bread

Yields one 10" star

Dough:

1 1/4 cup warm water (110° to 115°F)
1 tbsp instant yeast
1 tsp granulated sugar
3 eggs
1 tbsp honey
4 tbsps unsalted butter, browned and cooled
4 1/2 cups unbleached all-purpose flour, plus more if necessary
1 tbsp vanilla extract
1 tsp almond extract
1 tsp orange zest
1 tsp cinnamon
2 tsp sea salt
1 tsp vegetable oil
1 egg, beaten with 1 tbsp water

Filling:

2 sticks (8 oz) unsalted butter, softened
1/2 cup brown sugar
1 tbsp cinnamon
1/4 tsp ground cloves
1/2 tsp orange zest
1/4 tsp Kosher salt

1/4 cup raw sugar, for baking

Pecan Caramel Sauce:

4 ounces unsalted butter (1 stick)
1/2 cup brown sugar, packed

1/2 cup heavy cream
1 cinnamon stick
1/2 tsp vanilla extract
1 cup chopped pecans
1/2 tsp kosher salt

Powdered sugar, for dusting

To prepare the dough: Place the warm water in a small bowl with the sugar; sprinkle yeast over the water, cover with plastic wrap, and let stand for 5 minutes or until foamy. Stir to dissolve, if necessary.

To a small bowl, add eggs, honey and butter, whisking eggs to combine. Add the bloomed yeast water mixture.

In a stand mixer fitted with a dough hook, combine the flour, vanilla extract, almond extract, orange zest, cinnamon and salt and mix briefly to combine. Turn the mixer on low speed, add the yeast mixture, and mix to combine. Knead the dough until smooth and elastic, about 5 minutes until the dough comes together and pulls away from the side of the bowl. Alternatively, you can knead the dough by hand on a floured surface for about 10 minutes. If the dough is sticky, add an additional 1/2 cup flour.

Remove the dough from mixing bowl and form into a smooth ball. Grease a large bowl with vegetable oil and add the dough to the bowl, cover with plastic wrap and let rise at room temperature for about 1 to 1 1/2 hours, or until doubled in bulk.

To make the filling: Make sure butter is spreadable. In a small bowl, mix together the brown sugar and cinnamon. Set aside.

To shape the star: Line a sheet pan with parchment paper.

Punch down the dough in the mixing bowl. Lightly flour your work surface place dough on surface. Cut the dough evenly into 4 pieces and form each piece into a ball. With a rolling pin, roll each piece into a 10-inch circle. Place one circle on the parchment-lined sheet pan and spread 1/3 of the butter over, leaving 1/2-inch border. Sprinkle 1/3 of the cinnamon sugar over the butter. Repeat with two more layers and remaining filling. Top with the 4th dough round.

Place a small drinking glass or round cutter in the center of your dough as a guide (approximately 2"-diameter). Using a sharp knife, cut the dough into 4 equal segments stopping at the cup (see the photo). Then cut each of those segments into 4 equal segments, ending up with 16 equal segments. Take two segments next to each other and twist them outwards twice and then press the ends together to seal. Repeat until a star shape has formed. You may need to use a bit of egg wash to hold the star tips together. Cover the shaped star with greased plastic wrap and let rise 45 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 350°F. Remove the plastic wrap and brush the entire surface with egg wash. Bake for 15 minutes and rotate back to front. Bake for an additional 15 minutes until golden brown. Let the star cool for 10 minutes before serving. Dust with powdered sugar and serve the pecan caramel sauce on the side.

Prepare the Pecan Caramel Sauce: Combine the butter, brown sugar, heavy cream, cinnamon stick, and vanilla in a small saucepan over medium heat. Let the butter melt and mix well. Lower the heat to medium-low and simmer for 5 minutes. Stir in the pecans and salt. Simmer for another 5 minutes.

Serve warm. If the caramel cools, it will harden. You can always put it back over low heat with a splash of cream to loosen it up. Enjoy!!

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