

CHOCOLATE-CINNAMON BABKA WITH CRUMB TOPPING

Makes one 9-inch loaf

I don't do well with compliments. When someone praises me or my baked goods, I usually try to brush it off. This never works, of course, and I've slowly gotten better at just graciously saying "Thank you." But you can imagine my embarrassment when a mutual friend introduced me to Ruth Reichl, the famous food writer and former editor-in-chief of *Gourmet* magazine—and immediately my friend told her that not only was I writing a cookbook, but that I also made the best babka she had ever tasted! Ms. Reichl peered at me through her glasses as if she were sizing me up. Thankfully, she was very gracious and, sensing my discomfort, changed the subject, and we had a lovely conversation about New Zealand instead. But if I ever have a chance to meet her again, I'll bake her this babka.

DOUGH

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup whole milk

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup plus 1 teaspoon (54 g) granulated sugar, divided

2 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoons (1 package) active dry yeast

1 large egg

1 large egg yolk

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

3 cups (420 g) all-purpose flour

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon kosher salt

4 tablespoons (57 g or $\frac{1}{2}$ stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature

FILLING

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup (100 g) granulated sugar

2 tablespoons natural cocoa powder (not Dutch-process)

2 teaspoons ground cinnamon

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon instant coffee powder

$\frac{1}{8}$ teaspoon kosher salt

2 tablespoons boiling water

6 tablespoons (85 g or $\frac{3}{4}$ stick) unsalted butter

6 ounces (170 g) dark chocolate (use what you like to eat)*

STREUSEL

¼ cup (35 g) all-purpose flour

1 tablespoon granulated sugar

1 tablespoon packed dark brown sugar

½ teaspoon ground cinnamon

¼ teaspoon kosher salt

4 tablespoons (57 g or ½ stick) cold unsalted butter

TO ASSEMBLE

1 large egg yolk

1 tablespoon cold water

** If you absolutely love chocolate, you can increase the chopped chocolate from 6 ounces to up to 12 ounces. It's a bit of a chocolate overload for the bread, but my partner, who adores all things chocolate, loves it this way. For most people, though, 6 to 8 ounces is enough*

MAKE THE DOUGH

Heat the milk and 1 teaspoon of the sugar in a medium saucepan until the milk is warm to the touch. Sprinkle the yeast over the milk and set aside to proof for about 5 minutes, or until bubbles form on the surface of the milk.

Pour the milk into the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment. Add the egg, egg yolk, and vanilla. Mix on low speed for about 30 seconds to incorporate. Add the flour, the remaining ¼ cup (50 g) sugar, and the salt and mix on low speed until the flour is incorporated into the liquid and a sticky dough forms. Add the butter, 1 tablespoon at a time, waiting until it is incorporated before each addition.

Once all the butter is added, switch to the dough hook and knead the dough on medium-high speed until a smooth and slightly sticky dough forms, about 5 minutes. Gather the dough into a ball, stretching the dough so the top of the ball is smooth. Coat the mixer bowl with cooking spray, then place the dough back into the bowl, with the gathered rough part of the dough down and the smooth surface of the ball facing up. Cover with plastic wrap and let rise for about 1 hour, or until the dough has doubled in size.

MAKE THE FILLING

Combine the sugar, cocoa powder, cinnamon, instant coffee powder, and salt in a small bowl. Pour the water over the dry ingredients and stir with a fork to form a paste. Add the butter and use the fork to mix together. Chop the dark chocolate into ¼-inch chunks.

MAKE THE STREUSEL

Combine the flour, both sugars, cinnamon, and salt in a bowl and toss together with a fork. Cut the butter into ½-inch chunks, then toss them in the streusel ingredients. Using your fingers, blend the butter into the dry ingredients until it is incorporated and the mixture forms clumps. Set aside.

Once the dough has doubled, coat a 5 x 9-inch loaf pan with cooking spray and line the bottom and sides with parchment paper, with an inch or two of the paper overhanging the edges of the pan. Dust a clean surface with flour and roll the dough out to a rectangle roughly 15 x 17 inches, with a long side facing you (landscape orientation). Spread the butter paste over the surface of the dough, then sprinkle the chocolate evenly over the paste.

Tightly roll the dough up from the bottom, making a 17-inch rope. Slice the dough in half lengthwise, making two 17-inch long pieces. The dough might start to fall apart because there's so much chocolate. Twist each long piece individually so the chocolate is trapped inside the dough, tucking in any chocolate that has fallen out. Then twist and wrap the two ropes of dough together. Squish the twisted dough together and transfer it to the prepared loaf pan, tucking in any stray pieces of chocolate and dough. This is messy business but worth it in the end!

In a small bowl, mix the egg yolk and water to make an egg wash. Brush the egg wash over the top of the dough in the pan. Sprinkle the streusel over the top of the dough and then cover with a piece of plastic wrap and let rest for 30 minutes.

While the babka loaf is resting, preheat the oven to 350°F. Once the dough has rested (it won't have risen much, just a tiny bit), place the pan on a rimmed baking sheet and bake for 50 minutes. Reduce the oven temperature to 325°F and continue to bake until the top of the dough is deep brown, 15 to 20 minutes more. Let cool in the pan for 15 minutes, then use the parchment paper to lift the babka out of the pan and transfer it to a wire cooling rack. Let cool to room temperature, or serve warm, in thick slices.

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