



RECIPE OF THE WEEK: 18/04/2022

Tsoureki (Greek Easter Bread)

Makes 2 large loaves or 4 small ones

The Greek tsoureki bread needs a lot of kneading to create a lot of fibres. This creates a light, fluffy dough that will rise well. Making it in this way, results in an amazing, delicious bread. The characteristic taste and smell of the tsoureki bread comes from the aromatic Easter flavours of freshly ground mastic from the Chios Island and the mahlepi; an aromatic spice made from ground cherry seeds.

It is essential to use strong, white bread flour which has plenty of gluten to achieve a soft, fluffy texture but also a stringy one when the bread dough is pulled.

All the ingredients should be at room temperature when preparing the dough except for the milk, which should be lukewarm to activate the yeast.

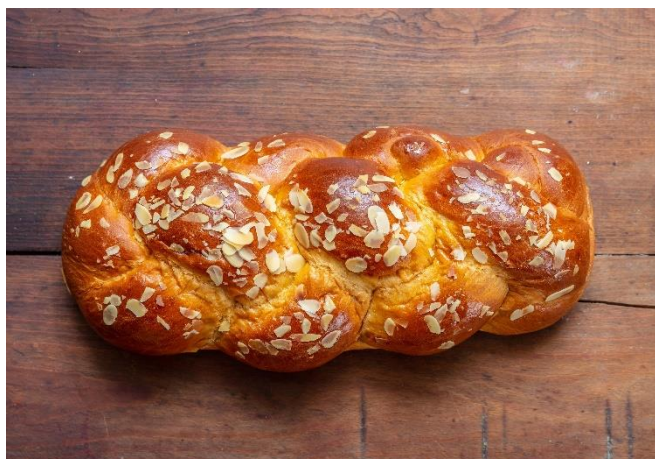
Ingredients

For the yeast mixture

25g dried yeast or 50g fresh yeast
30g sugar
100ml tepid milk (16°C-38°C)
100g strong white flour

For the dough

250g fresh full fat milk, tepid
250g cold butter, cut into cubes
¼ tsp ground mahlepi
¼ tsp finely ground mastic
zest from 1 orange
1 tsp vanilla essence
250g granulated sugar
3 large free-range eggs or 4 medium free-range eggs
2 egg yolks from large free-range eggs
½ tsp salt
1Kg strong white flour



For sprinkling on top of the tsoureki

30g almond slithers

For the egg wash

1 large free-range egg yolk
1 tbsp sugar
2 tbsp water

Method

Activating the yeast

Put the yeast and milk in a bowl and mix well with a whisk. Set aside for 5-10 minutes until the yeast is activated and the surface starts frothing. Add the flour and stir well with a spoon to make a very thick batter. Cover the bowl with clingfilm and leave it in a warm place for 20-30 minutes.

Making the dough

1. In a small casserole, add the milk, butter, mahlepi, mastic, orange zest, vanilla essence and the sugar. Heat the casserole over a low heat until the butter melts stirring with a whisk. Be careful not to over-heat the ingredients. If the temperature rises about 30°C this will de-activate the yeast. Remove the casserole from the heat and set aside.

2. In a large bowl, beat the eggs, egg yolks and salt and whisk well.

3. Add the flour, yeast, melted butter, milk and the spices to the same bowl. Oil your hands lightly and knead the dough until you achieve a smooth, non-sticky dough. If you wish, put all the ingredients in a mixer and use the dough hook on a low speed to combine all the ingredients. Increase the speed to mediumhigh for about 15-20 minutes until the dough comes away from the side of the bowl.

4. Place the dough in a bowl which you have lightly greased and cover with clingfilm or a clean kitchen towel. Leave it to rise in a warm place for 2-3 hours, until it doubles in size. To ensure that the dough is ready, press your fingers into the dough and when the dough bounces back, it means that it is ready.

5. Put the dough onto a floured surface and knead a little until the dough is deflated. Take half of the dough and divide it into 3 equal pieces and form into long strips about 30cm long. Press the end of the dough strips to stick them together, and then one at a time, plait the strips of dough, folding one piece on top the other. Place the dough on a tray, covered with grease-proof paper. Make another tsoureki using the other half of the dough, following the same process. Alternatively, you can make 4 smaller plaits. Cover the tray with a towel and leave them for 2 hours to double in size.

6. Pre-heat the oven to 180°C/160°C fan/ gas 4.

7. In a small bowl, put all the ingredients for the egg wash and beat with a spoon. Brush the Easter loaves with the wash on the surface and sprinkle the almond slivers evenly on top.

8. At this stage, you may put a hard-boiled red egg in the middle of the tsoureki if you wish.

9. Bake the tsourekia breads in the pre-heated oven for 30 minutes until golden-brown.

10. Remove the tray from the oven and let the tsoureki breads cool for 10 minutes before serving.