

to prevent sticking. Turn dough over in a greased bowl; cover and let rise in a warm place (about 2 hours). Punch dough down; roll out on a lightly floured board to release air. Shape each half into a round loaf about 8 inches in diameter. Place each on a greased baking sheet; cover and let rise in a warm place until almost doubled (about 1 hour).

Bake in a 350° oven for about 35 minutes (switch pan positions halfway through baking) or until loaves sound hollow when tapped. Brush tops with melted butter. Cool on racks. Makes 2 loaves.

Challah

This festive, seed-studded braid with its glossy brown crust and delicate flavor is called *challah* (pronounced and sometimes spelled "hallah"). Now a popular delicatessen item, challah has long-standing religious significance for the Jewish people, who enjoy it on the Sabbath and often adorn it with a sugar glaze and candied fruit or candies for special holidays. (Photograph on page 43.)

- 1 package active dry yeast
- 1 1/4 cups warm water (about 110°)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 cup each sugar and salad oil
- 2 eggs, slightly beaten
- 2 or 3 drops yellow food coloring, or pinch of saffron
- 5 to 5 1/2 cups all-purpose flour, unsifted
- 1 egg yolk beaten with 1 tablespoon water
- About 1 tablespoon sesame seed or poppy seed

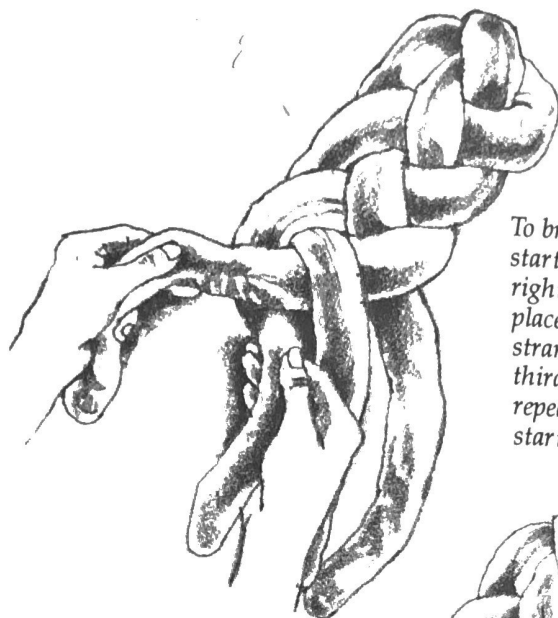
In a large bowl, dissolve yeast in water. Stir in salt, sugar, oil, eggs, and food coloring. Gradually beat in about 4 1/2 cups of the flour to make a stiff dough.

Turn dough out onto a floured board and knead until smooth and satiny (5 to 20 minutes), adding flour as needed to prevent sticking. Turn dough over in a greased bowl; cover and let rise in a warm place until doubled (about 1 1/2 hours). Punch dough down; knead briefly on a lightly floured board to release air. Set aside and cover about 3/4 cup dough.

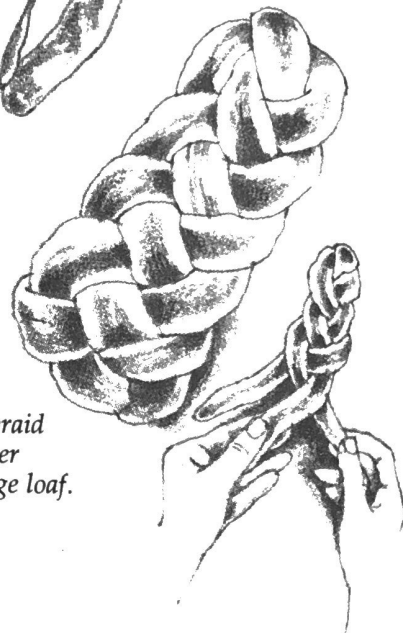
Divide remaining dough into 4 equal portions; roll each between hands to form a strand about 20 inches long. Place the 4 strips lengthwise on a greased baking sheet, pinch tops together, and braid as follows: pick up strand on right, bring it over next one, under the third, and over the fourth. Repeat, always starting with strand on right, until braid is complete. Pinch ends together.

Roll reserved dough into a strip about 15 inches long; cut into 3 strips and make a small 3-strand braid. Lay on top center of large braid. Cover and let rise in a warm place until almost doubled (about 1 hour).

Using a soft brush or your fingers, spread egg yolk mixture evenly over braids; sprinkle with seed. Bake in a 350° oven for 30 to 35 minutes or until loaf is golden brown and sounds hollow when tapped. Serve warm, or let cool on rack. Makes 1 loaf.



To braid challah: starting with right-hand strand, place it over second strand, under third, over fourth; repeat, always starting at right.



Braid little braid and place over center of large loaf.

Soft Pretzels

German soft pretzels are crusty but have a more breadlike interior than commercial crisp pretzels. Though they are best the day you bake them, you can freeze extras, then reheat to serve. Try them warm with butter or your favorite spicy mustard.

- 1 package active dry yeast
- 1 cup warm water (about 110°)
- 2 1/2 to 2 3/4 cups all-purpose flour, unsifted
- 2 tablespoons salad oil
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 6 cups water with 6 tablespoons soda
- Coarse salt

In a bowl, dissolve yeast in water. Add 1 1/2 cups of the flour, the oil, and sugar. Beat for about 3 minutes