

My polish grandmother was known for her yeast dough cake filled with cocoa and sugar, poppy seeds, or sweet cheese with raisins. She used to spread the filling over the dough and then rolled it into a cylinder, then placed the cylinders side by side on a sheet pan. That way the filling stayed inside the rolled dough and only after baking and slicing it opened, we were able to discover the rich filling inside. This concept of cake that is basically made with a bread dough filled with sweet filling, is what known here in the US as Babka cake. Back in Israel we never used that term and I believe the first time I heard it in reference to the same type of yeasted cake – was in that famous babka episode in Seinfeld.

I'm sharing here the yeast-leavened dough recipe that runs in our family for generation, filled with sweetened tahini paste – a hybrid between the eastern European yeasted dough to the Middle Eastern halvah confection. The technique is like my grandma's, but instead of baking the long cylinders they are being cut into thick slices and place side by side in a baking pan. The result is a rose garden-like cake, that can be easily break apart and served in rolls.

Note that it's better to make the dough the day before you are planning to bake the cake.

Sweet Tahini Babka Rolls

Makes 1 round babka cake (use 12" round pan) or 2 loaf pans.

Ingredients

Dough: 500 gr (3.5 cups) all-purpose flour

75 gr (1/3 cup) sugar

8 gr (2 teaspoons) active dry yeast

2 eggs

120 gr (1/2 cup) milk

85 gr (6 Tablespoons) unsalted butter at room temperature

¼ tsp salt

Filling: 1 egg

150 gr (3/4 cup) sugar

1/4 teaspoon vanilla extract

25 gr (1 Tablespoon) Honey

20 gr (2.5 Tablespoons) all-purpose flour

1/4 salt

200 gr (3/4 cup + 1 Tablespoon) Tahini paste

Tahini glaze: 1 Tablespoon sesame seeds, lightly dry roasted (optimal)

50 gr (1/4 cup) sugar

60 gr (1/4 cup) water

15 gr (1 Tablespoon) tahini paste

Preparation

- **Make the dough:** In a mixer bowl with a dough hook attachment, measure flour, yeast, and sugar. Add the milk and the eggs. Mix for 2 min on low -medium speed.
- Add the butter to the bowl and mix for additional 7 mins. When the dough is starting to come together (about 5 mins into mixing) increase to medium speed.
- Add the salt and mix for 1 more minute. Dough should be smooth and elastic.
- Stretch and fold the dough into a ball. Dust the bowl interior and the top of the dough with flour and place it back inside the bowl.
- Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 4 hours or overnight.
- **Make the filling:** In a medium bowl whisk the egg, sugar, and vanilla. Whisk in the honey, and then the flour and salt. Add in the tahini and whisk into a smooth mixture. Cover and chill in the fridge for at least 30 mins.
- **Make the syrup:** In a small saucepan lightly roast the sesame seeds, remove, and set aside. In the same saucepan combine sugar and water. Simmer over medium heat until sugar is completely dissolved. Set aside to cool, then whisk in the tahini, and add in the roasted sesame seeds.
- **Assembling the cake:** Remove the dough from the refrigerator and divide into half. On a lightly floured surface roll each half into 10x20 inch rectangle, about 1/4 inch thick. Spread the filling evenly all the way to the edges. Then roll each one into a tight log.

- Slice the roll into pieces, about 2" wide, and arrange in a buttered greased baking pan, spacing ½" apart. Cover loosely with a plastic bag and set aside to rise until doubled in volume.
- Preheat oven to 350°F. Bake for 35--40 mins until the cake is turned golden brown.
- Remove from oven, let cool for 5 mins and brush with the tahini glaze, and serve.