

SWEET LITTLE CAKES
- FROM -
MRS. ZABAR'S BAKESHOP

PERFECT DESSERTS FOR SHARING



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PHOTOGRAPHY BY ELLEN SILVERMAN

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B A B K A

with choice of four fillings

This babka recipe is from a long-lost cousin who worked in a bakery many years ago. The fillings have varied over the years, per my family's requests. You can make all four babkas with the same filling, or mix them up. For example, if baking four chocolate babkas, make a quadruple batch of the Chocolate Filling and Drizzle. Other filling variations to consider are poppy seed, cheese, apple, or raisin. I like to use berries and figs when they are in season. Many old-school bakeries either bake a streusel on each babka or, once cooled, add a thick layer of confectioners' sugar on top and then drizzle melted chocolate on top of the sugar. I prefer to skip the streusel and sugar topping, and just use the drizzle. However you top it, babka is a *bubbe*-worthy treat, especially when you slice it and make it into decadent French toast, with *crème anglaise* or chocolate sauce on the side. • MAKES DOUGH FOR FOUR 6-INCH BABKAS (EACH SERVES 4)

¾ cup whole milk or heavy cream, heated to 90°F	3 large eggs, at room temperature
1 tablespoon instant yeast	2 teaspoons pure vanilla bean paste
3 tablespoons plus 2 teaspoons granulated sugar, plus more for the pans	3¾ cups all-purpose flour, plus more for rolling
3 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened, plus more for the bowl and pans	½ teaspoon salt

In a small bowl, mix the milk or heavy cream, yeast, and 2 teaspoons granulated sugar. Let sit until foamy, about 10 minutes.

In the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the paddle attachment, cream the 3 tablespoons butter and 3 tablespoons granulated sugar. Add the eggs and beat to incorporate, then add the milk-yeast mixture and vanilla bean paste, and mix. Add the 3¾ cups flour and salt and mix just until combined.

recipe continues

Butter a large bowl. Place the dough in the buttered bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and let it sit in a warm, draft-free place until doubled in volume, for about 1 hour.

CHOCOLATE BABKA

CHOCOLATE BABKA FILLING AND DRIZZLE

makes enough for one 6-inch babka

3 tablespoons unsalted butter	1½ teaspoons Dutch process
3 ounces bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, coarsely chopped	cocoa powder
3 tablespoons granulated sugar	Pinch of salt
	3 tablespoons chocolate chips, for sprinkling on the filling

In the top of a double boiler, melt the butter and chopped chocolate. Remove the top of the double boiler from the heat, stir, and add the granulated sugar, cocoa, and salt. Leave the bottom of the double boiler, partially filled with water, on the stove for finishing the babkas. Let the filling cool for 15 minutes.

STREUSEL (OPTIONAL)

makes enough for one 6-inch babka

¼ cup all-purpose flour	Pinch of salt
2 tablespoons packed light brown sugar	4 tablespoons cold unsalted butter, cut into ½-inch cubes
1 teaspoon ground cinnamon	

In a medium bowl, toss together the flour, brown sugar, cinnamon, and salt. Add the butter and mix, leaving small lumps of butter that are not incorporated. Set aside.

ASSEMBLING THE BABKAS

Butter four 6-inch baby loaf pans. Sprinkle some granulated sugar into each pan, shake to coat, and discard the excess. Line a half-sheet pan with parchment paper and set aside.

Place a new piece of parchment paper on the counter and sprinkle it with a small amount of flour. Cut the dough into 4 equal pieces. Place one piece of the dough on the floured parchment paper and sprinkle a bit more flour on top of it. Place another piece of parchment paper on top of the dough and, using a rolling pin on top of the parchment, roll it out until it is a ¼-inch-thick rough rectangle. Remove the top piece of parchment.

If making the chocolate babka, scrape about three-quarters of the filling on top. Place the remaining filling in the top of the double boiler. (For the other fillings, follow the steps outlined for each on pages 56 and 57.) Spread the filling on the dough with a metal offset spatula, leaving a 1-inch border all around. Sprinkle the chocolate chips on top of the filling.

Roll up the dough like a jelly roll and tuck in both sides. Gently press the dough so that all edges are sealed, then twist the dough, fold it in half, and place in the prepared pan. If using the streusel, with the side of your hand, make a lengthwise dent in the top of the babka, and sprinkle the streusel on top.

Repeat with the other three babkas. Set them in a warm, draft-free place until they rise, for about 30 minutes. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 350°F.

Bake the babkas for about 40 minutes. The tops will puff up quite high. Cool completely in the pans. If making chocolate babkas, melt the reserved filling in the top of the double boiler and drizzle on top of the cooled babkas, then remove the babkas from the pans.

recipe continues

VARIATION:

PEANUT BUTTER AND JELLY BABKA FILLING

makes enough for one 6-inch babka

¼ cup creamy peanut butter	3 tablespoons packed light brown
⅓ cup jam or preserves, preferably apricot or peach	sugar, for sprinkling

After rolling out the dough, spread the peanut butter on top, leaving a 1-inch border all the way around. Spread the jam or preserves on top of the peanut butter, then roll up the dough like a jelly roll and tuck in both sides. Gently press the dough so that all edges are sealed, then twist the dough, fold it in half, and place in the prepared loaf pan.

Sprinkle the brown sugar on top. Set it in a warm, draft-free place until it rises, for about 30 minutes. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 350°F.

Bake the babka until set, about 40 minutes. The top will puff up quite high. Cool completely in the pan before removing the cake from the pan.

VARIATION:

HAZELNUT-CHOCOLATE CHIP BABKA FILLING

makes enough for one 6-inch babka

¼ cup store-bought hazelnut spread	2 tablespoons packed light brown
¼ cup chocolate chips	sugar, for sprinkling

After rolling out the dough, spread the hazelnut spread on top, leaving a 1-inch border all the way around. Sprinkle the chocolate chips on top, then roll up the dough like a jelly roll and tuck in both sides. Gently press the dough so that all edges are sealed, then twist the dough, fold it in half, and place in the prepared loaf pan.

Sprinkle the brown sugar on top. Set it in a warm, draft-free place until it rises, for about 30 minutes. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 350°F.

Bake the babka until set, about 40 minutes. The top will puff up quite high. Cool completely in the pan before removing the cake from the pan.

VARIATION:

BERRY OR FIG BABKA FILLING

makes enough for one 6-inch babka

¼ cup berry or fig preserves

2 tablespoons granulated sugar,

½ cup fresh raspberries

for sprinkling

After rolling out the dough, spread the berry or fig preserves on top, leaving a ¾-inch border all the way around. Sprinkle fresh raspberries on top, then roll up the dough like a jelly roll and tuck in both sides. Gently press the dough so that all edges are sealed, then twist the dough, fold it in half, and place in the prepared loaf pan.

Sprinkle the granulated sugar on top. Set it in a warm, draft-free place until it rises, for about 30 minutes. Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 350°F.

Bake the babka until set, about 40 minutes. The top will puff up quite high. Cool completely in the pan before removing the cake from the pan.