Cinnamon Babka

Two soft, fluffy brioche loaves enriched with a tangzhong starter and swirled with butter, brown sugar and cinnamon, then twisted and baked until deep golden. It tastes like cinnamon rolls in sliceable loaf form and stays tender for days.

300 min · 2 loaves · involved · Jewish-American



INGREDIENTS

Tangzhong

- ☐ **3 tbsp** water
- ☐ **3 tbsp** whole milk
- ☐ **2 tbsp** bread flour

Dough

- ☐ **4 tbsp (2 oz / 57 g)** unsalted butter
- ☐ **3/4 cup** whole milk
- ☐ **2 1/4 tsp (1 packet)** instant/rapid rise or active dry yeast
- ☐ **1/4 cup** granulated sugar, divided: 1 tsp for proofing yeast
- ☐ **3 1/2 cups** bread flour, spooned and leveled
- ☐ **1 tsp** coarse kosher salt, use half the amount if using table salt
- ☐ **1/4 tsp** ground nutmeg
- ☐ **1/4 tsp** ground cardamom
- ☐ **2 large** eggs, room temperature
- ☐ **1 tsp** vanilla extract

Filling

- ☐ **4 tbsp (2 oz / 57 g)** unsalted butter, melted
- ☐ **3/4 cup** light or dark brown sugar, packed
- ☐ **1 1/2 tbsp** ground cinnamon

METHOD

Make the tangzhong

1. In a small saucepan, whisk the water, milk and flour over medium heat for a few minutes, whisking constantly, until thickened into a paste. Scrape into a small bowl and set aside.

Make the dough

2. In the same saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat, stir in the milk and warm just to 110–115°F (43–46°C); let cool if it overshoots.
3. Off the heat, stir in the yeast and 1 tsp of the sugar; let stand 5–10 minutes until foamy and bubbling.
4. In a stand mixer bowl, stir the flour, yeast mixture, tangzhong, remaining sugar, salt, nutmeg, cardamom, eggs and vanilla into a shaggy dough. Knead with the dough hook on medium-low for 10 minutes; it will be soft, sticky and loose—don't add more flour.
5. Place in a greased bowl at least 3 times the dough's size, cover tightly and let rise in a warm spot until doubled, 40–45 minutes.
6. Refrigerate the covered bowl at least 2 hours or overnight. Meanwhile, butter and flour two loaf pans.

Fill and shape

7. Turn the cold dough onto a floured surface, dust the top with flour, press out the air and roll into a roughly 15x20-inch (38x50 cm) rectangle.
8. Brush the melted butter over the dough to the edges. Mix the brown sugar and cinnamon and sprinkle evenly over the butter.
9. Roll up tightly from a long side into a log, then cut in half crosswise to make two 10-inch logs.
10. Slice each log lengthwise down the center, twist the two halves together cut-side up, and place in the pans, tucking the ends under.
11. Let rise 30–45 minutes, until puffy and filling the pans but not over the tops. Meanwhile, heat the oven to 350°F (175°C) with a rack in the center.

Bake

12. Bake 35–40 minutes, until deep golden brown and the center reads 195°F (90°C) on an instant-read thermometer.
13. Cool in the pans 15 minutes, turn out onto a rack and cool at least 1 hour before slicing with a serrated knife.

TIPS

– Check the milk temperature with a thermometer: too cold won't activate the yeast and too hot will kill it.

– With instant yeast you can skip proofing and add it straight to the dough; active dry yeast should be proofed first.

– Use room-temperature eggs (sit out an hour or in hot water) so cold eggs don't slow the rise.

– Use a very large bowl for the chill, since this active dough keeps rising in the fridge and can spill over.
– Developed at 5,280 ft; at lower altitudes the ingredients usually work as-is but rises may take longer.
– Taller pullman pans (9x4x4 in) give a taller, nicer-shaped loaf than standard loaf pans.
– Buttermilk can be used in place of whole milk.
– Store airtight at room temperature 3–5 days, or wrap well and freeze up to 3–6 months.
– Leftover babka makes excellent French toast or bread pudding.
