

8. Vanocka 2023

Vanocka – Sweet Czech Christmas Bread

1 loaf (about 12 servings)

Ingredients:

Leaven:

½ cup of lukewarm milk - about 90 to 100°F
(preheat in a microwave)

½ cup of bread flour (or all-purpose)

1 TBSP of confectioners' sugar

1 TBSP of active dry yeasts

Dough:

½ cup of raisins

2 TSP of rum extract

2 eggs - room temperature (remove from the fridge about an hour before preparing the dough)

1 cup of granulated sugar

1 stick (¼ LB) of soft butter – room temperature but not melted (room temperature)

1 TSP of vanilla extract

Zest for 1 lemon

4 cups of bread flour (or all-purpose) + **extra** flour for flouring the surface

½ cup of lukewarm milk - about 90 to 100°F
(preheat in microwave)

Egg brush:

1 egg

¼ cup of milk

Final touch:

Sprinkle with confectioners' sugar

Tools:

Measuring Spoons & Measuring Cups

2 Small Mixing Bowls (about 1 QT)

Whisk

Kitchen Mixer with Whisk and Hook Attachment

Plastic Wrap

Bowl Scraper or Silicone Spatula

Small Hand Grater or Zester

Measuring Pitcher or Small Glass/Ceramic

Mixing Bowl

Silicone Brush

Medium Size Baking Sheet with Parchment Paper

Directions:

Already done:

1. Leaven:

1.1. Place into a medium mixing bowl:

½ cup of lukewarm milk

½ cup of bread flour

1 TBSP of confectioners' sugar

1 TBSP of active dry yeasts

Thoroughly stir with a whisk until fully combined (about 1 - 2 minutes).

1.2. Cover with plastic wrap and using a knife, create 1 small hole to let the leaven breathe.

1.3. Set aside until it doubles in volume (about 15 – 20 minutes).

2. Raisin preparation:

2.1. Place into a mixing bowl:

½ cup of raisins

2 TSP of rum extract

Thoroughly stir.

2.2. Let it sit on a countertop until needed in a later step.

3. Dough:

3.1. Place into a kitchen mixer with a whisk attachment:

2 eggs - room temperature

1 cup of granulated sugar

1 stick (¼ LB) of soft butter

1 TSP of vanilla extract

Whisk on high speed until fully incorporated—the butter is fully incorporated, and a creamy texture is reached (about 2- 4 minutes).

3.2. Replace the whisk attachment with a hook attachment and add:

Leaven from step 1

Zest for 1 lemon

4 cups of bread flour

½ cup of lukewarm milk

Knead on slow speed until all ingredients are partially combined (for about 1 – 2 minutes).

3.3. Then increase the speed to medium-high and knead until nicely combined (about 1 - 2 minutes).

3.4. Then add:

Raisins from step 1 (including the rum residue)

And process for an additional minute until incorporated.

3.5. The final dough is slightly sticky and can partially stick to the bottom of the bowl. Use a bowl scraper to release it from the hook and the bottom of the bowl.

4. **Raise the dough:**

4.1. Remove the mixing bowl from the mixer and cover with plastic wrap (make some holes to let the dough breathe).

4.2. Let it rise in a warm place until it has doubled in size (about 2 - 3 hours).

Start here:

5. **Vánočka pre-shaping:**

Note: Work on a lightly floured surface.

5.1. Using a bowl scraper, separate the dough into 6 even pieces.

5.2. Then roll each piece into a strand - a long rope shape with a thickness of about $\frac{3}{4}$ - 1".

5.3. Separate the strands so 3 are on the right and 3 are on the left and connect all six strands by pinching them together at the top.

6. Vánočka shaping:

- 6.1. Cross hands (with the left on the top), and with each hand, grab the outermost strand from both sides.
- 6.2. Cross your hands and then place the strand from the right into the center (your left hand then becomes empty). Then, with your left hand, take the outermost strand on the right side.
- 6.3. Cross your left hand under your right hand, and place the strand in your right hand into the center. Then, with your right hand, take the outermost strand on the left side.
- 6.4. Repeat this process until your Vánočka is complete.
- 6.5. When you get to the end of the Vanocka, push the ends together and then fold under the Vanocka.
- 6.6. Then place the Vanocka on a baking sheet with parchment paper or a silicone mat.

7. Proofing:

- 7.1. Prepare a brushing mixture by briefly hand whisking **1** egg with **¼ cup** of milk in a measuring pitcher.
- 7.2. Brush the Vánočka (keep about ½ for a second brushing).
- 7.3. Let the Vánočka proof in a warm place (for example, a lukewarm oven) until it doubles in size (about 60 minutes).

8. Baking:

- 8.1. Preheat oven to 350°F.
 - 8.2. Brush the Vánočka with the remaining brushing mixture.
 - 8.3. Bake in a preheated oven for 15 minutes.
 - 8.4. Then lower heat to 300°F and bake for an additional 35 – 45 minutes until fully baked (you reach a nice dark, but not burnt, color).
 - 8.5. Remove from the oven and let fully cool before serving.
9. Slice and optionally serve with butter and/or a preserve of any kind. Optionally, sprinkle with confectioners' sugar

Disclaimer:

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