

Anna's Easter Bread: La Pigna di Pasqua

by Sabrina Drudi

This cherished family recipe holds a special place in Sabrina Drudi's heart. Every Easter, she and her Nonna, Anna would come together in the kitchen to bake sweet, braided bread – a tradition filled with laughter, flour-dusted counters and the comforting scent of rising dough. For Sabrina, it was more than baking: It was a lesson in love, patience and the joy of shared moments. Now she's passing the tradition on to her own daughters, Anna and Giulia, creating new memories while honouring generations of family warmth. This Easter bread isn't just delicious: It's a symbol of connection, celebration and enduring love. This recipe also doubles as challah for the Jewish high holidays. For Shabbat, braid the ropes to form an elongated loaf and don't connect the ends.

 3 loaves

 > 60 min

 Yes

 Let dough rise

1 (8 g) package of yeast
6 tbsp sugar, divided
5 eggs
1 tsp sea salt
5 1/2 tbsp extra-virgin olive oil
4 cups all-purpose white flour, divided,
plus more for dusting
1 egg yolk whisked with 1 tbsp water, for brushing
Sesame seeds, for sprinkling

In a small bowl, dissolve yeast with 1 tablespoon sugar in 1/4 cup warm water. Let sit for about 10 minutes, until foamy and bubbly.

In a medium bowl, beat eggs and remaining 5 tablespoons of sugar, salt, and oil. Pour in yeast mixture and whisk to combine.

In an extra-large bowl, pour 3 cups of flour and make a large well in the centre. Gradually pour the egg mixture into the well and begin to mix with a fork until a loose dough forms. The dough will be wet. Add the remaining 1 cup of flour and with clean hands, knead for about 5 minutes, until a smooth dough forms. It will be slightly tacky but not sticky.

Lift the dough, spray the large bowl with non-stick olive oil cooking spray and roll the ball of dough around until evenly coated. Place the dough in the bowl and loosely cover with a clean, damp cloth. Let sit in a dark and warm area for 2 hours. The dough will look wet, but don't worry.

Preheat oven to 325°F. Line a 9 x 13-inch baking sheet with parchment paper.

Lightly dust your hands and the ball of dough with flour and begin to knead, for about a minute, until no longer sticky.

Divide dough into 3 balls. Leave 2 of the balls covered with the damp cloth while you work with the first one.

Divide this ball into 3 portions and roll each into a ball. Roll out each ball into a rope approximately 20 inches long. There is no need to flour the work surface – the dough will not stick. Line up the 3 ropes and pinch the tops together to bind them.

Braid the ropes to form a straight loaf and then bring the two ends together to form a circle. Transfer to the prepared baking sheet, brush with egg wash and sprinkle with sesame seeds.

Bake for 10 minutes, loosely tent with aluminum foil, and continue to bake for about 12 minutes longer, until cooked through and golden on top and the internal temperature registers about 195°F on an instant-read digital thermometer. Transfer to a wire rack and let cool completely. Repeat with the other two balls of dough*.

Once cooled, serve or wrap in plastic wrap to ensure that the bread stays fresh for the next day.



SABRINA'S TIP

*After dividing the dough into three balls, you can bake one immediately and store the remaining two for later use.

→ Fridge: Wrap each dough ball tightly in plastic wrap and place in an airtight container. Store for up to 24 hours. When ready to use, let the dough come to room temperature before shaping and baking.

→ Freezer: Wrap each dough ball tightly in plastic wrap, then in foil and place in a freezer-safe bag or container. Freeze for up to one month. Thaw overnight in the fridge, then let come to room temperature before shaping and baking.