

Paska

Ukrainian Easter Bread

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From Baba Julia Elnisky

Start early in the day; it has to rise 4 times.



1½ tsp. active dry yeast
3 Tbl. sugar
1½ C. lukewarm milk
up to 8 C. flour
3 eggs, lightly beaten
1-4 uncolored hard-boiled eggs in the shell (optional)
½ stick butter, melted and cooled
2 tsp. salt
½ C. raisins, tossed with a little flour to coat each raisin
egg wash (1 egg beaten lightly with 1 Tbl. cold water)

You can make one big paska or several small ones. To make a big one, you'll need a large 8" to 10" pan with tall sides. My grandmother used an ovenproof soup pot. I use an angel food pan with the center tube section replaced with the bottom of a spring form pan. I've also made small paskas in a saucepan and in a 4" ceramic ramekin.

Butter the pan(s) well.

Be sure the warmed ingredients (water, milk, and butter) are not too hot to kill the yeast. In a large bowl, combine the yeast, a little sugar, and ½ cup warm water. Let stand 15 minutes. Add the warm milk and 2½ cups of the flour, stirring until smooth. Cover and let rise 1 hour or until light and bubbly.



Mix in the 3 beaten eggs, the rest of the sugar, the melted butter, and the salt. Knead in enough flour so it's the consistency of soft pizza dough. Knead 10 minutes by hand or 3 minutes by machine. Separate ⅔ cup of the dough for the trim (or 1C. for a circular braid) and knead in enough flour to make it stiff. Take the large ball of dough and knead in the raisins. Cover both dough balls and let them rise **twice**, punching down in between.

Place the large ball in the buttered pan and let it rise about halfway up.

Meanwhile, working on a floured surface, form the small ball into decorations. I like to make a braid encircling the top of the loaf. To do that, divide the dough into 3 equal pieces. Roll/stretch each piece into a 28" rope (yep!), about the thickness of a crayon. If the rope gets too dry while working, moisten with a spray bottle. Braid.

Carefully place the decorations on the risen loaf. For small trims, moisten with a dab of water to attach. Spray the whole thing lightly with water and let it rise about 15 minutes more.

Place the oven shelf at the bottom position and preheat the oven to 425°.

If decorating with hard-boiled eggs, gently place them on top just before putting the paska in the oven. Don't press them into the dough. Don't use colored eggs or the colors will bleed into the dough. (You can color them with markers later.)

Bake at 425° for 10 minutes. Then brush the top of the dough with the egg wash, lower the oven to 350°, and bake another 50-60 minutes. If making small loaves, bake at 425° for 5 minutes, then 350° for 20-30 minutes, depending on the size of the loaf. Peek frequently and cover with foil if the top browns too fast. (I always have to.)

Remove from the oven, cool 5 minutes on a rack, and carefully remove from the pan. If done, the bottom will sound hollow when tapped. Allow to cool completely. If desired, decorate the eggs with markers. Covered tightly to keep fresh.

Serve with lots of butter.

Христос воскрес! Christ is risen!

