



Family Traditions

Biscochias & Challah



Every family has its favorite foods. Some families are blessed with unique recipes that have lasted for generations. Holiday time is when these foods come out. The origins of certain foods are lost to the ages, but the recipes and methods have been passed down to the

present day. The family member who takes it onto his or herself to make these family traditional recipes each year really should write down the recipe and method, to ensure the continuation of the tradition, and to maybe share with the rest of the world.

My Grandfather in law, Elia Varon was born in Turkey. As a young man, he moved to Salonika, Greece, during the First World War, and met his wife Sarah. Both were Sephardim, with their traditions and foods having ancient roots dating back to their ancestors who lived in Spain. The Varons immigrated to the US in the early 20's. Elia, according to those who knew him, was a tough old bird, but good to kids, and knew how to make bischochas. He was the one who would take the time to make these simple cookies on Fridays, and at holiday times, and bring them to the big dinners and feasts.

This recipe has gone through a few generations since then, but all agree that the cookie remains the same. At Thanksgiving, Chanukah, and other times, there would be certain foods expected, among them lots and lots of Bischochas, and Challah bread, both homemade and fresh. Each family member gets a big bag of cookies to bring home. The phone calls start weeks before the holiday making sure that the source would be ready with the goods.

Bischochas are a pretty simple cookie to make. You use a straight dough method, you let it rest, then roll the dough into little tubes, score the tops, shape them into

rounds, apply an egg wash, and bake. A good baker can make double the following recipe in about 2 hours, and come up with 200 cookies. They last a very long time; in fact I think they improve with a week or so of age.

Challah bread looks to be daunting to the home baker, as it is a rather special bread. In reality, it is a very simple procedure, if you are careful and follow a few rules. Make sure the yeast and water mix is at the right temperature, not too hot or too cold. Mix well to build up the gluten in the dough. Allow the dough to rise double, form into loaves, and let rise again. Wash and bake.

Challah bread makes by far the best French toast in the world. Raisin Challah bread make the best regular toast. These loaves improve with age, and are much better a day or two old, and great from the freezer. Take a fresh loaf, several hours old, slice it, bag it, and freeze it, and you're set for breakfasts for the week.

There are many traditions associated with Challah, and I would get into trouble by even trying to list them, for fear of getting them wrong, or neglecting an important one. Many are religious in origin, but I am really only looking at this great loaf of bread. Two that are good to mention are the actual braid, which is sort of difficult. A 6 braid is difficult, but most impressive as the shape of the loaf will take on a tower effect. Another is the taking of a tiny piece of dough and throwing it in the oven, as a blessing.

These are but two family traditional recipes. If you think about it, your family probably only has a few unique dishes, but those few are treasured. Aunt Sally's Macaroni and Cheese, Uncle Charlie's Barbeque Sauce, Mildred's Goulash. Sit with them some year, and write down the recipe and method. Save them for the generations.

John Griffin

CONTINUE

BISCHOCHAS

Eggs	6
Oil	1/2 cup
Sugar	1 1/2 cup
Flour	5 1/2 cup
Baking powder	1 1/2 tsp
Vanilla	1 tsp
Salt	pinch
Water	2 tbs
Sesame seeds	1/2 cup

Mix eggs with sugar and water, add the oil and vanilla. Sift the baking powder into the flour, and add to the dough. Mix about 2 minutes, until well incorporated, but do not over mix.

Let the dough rest for about 10 minutes. Take out about half the dough, on a lightly floured cutting board. Roll into a log around 2" wide. Cut into 1" sections. Roll out each section on the board to about 3" strips, until all sections have been rolled out. Score the strips lengthwise down the middle, and then make many little slits on one side of the roll. Form into round cookies, pressing the ends together, still on the board.

Pick up gently and place on a sheet pan with parchment paper. Wash the tops of the cookies with well-beaten eggs, lightly. Sprinkle sesame seeds on some of the cookies. Bake at 350 degrees for about 10 minutes, until they are nicely browned. Allow to cool on the pan, and place in a tin or bags. These will keep over a month in a dry tin with no refrigeration.



CHALLAH

Bread flour	2 1/2 #
Salt	1 oz
Sugar	2 oz
Oil	2 oz
Egg yolks	3 each
Whole egg	1 each
Yeast	3/4 oz
Water	2 cups, 4 oz

Mix the yeast in water warmed to about 100 degrees, and half the sugar. Let sit until it starts to bubble a little. Add the rest of the ingredients, and mix well with a dough hook about 8 minutes. Cover with a damp cloth, and let sit at room temperature about an hour, until it doubles in bulk.

Cut into 4 equal portions, and shape as you wish, either rounded, straight bread, or braided. Place on sheet pans with parchment paper. Let rest after forming, for over a half hour. Wash the tops with some beaten eggs. Bake 375 degrees for about 40 minutes.



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