

Lebanese Talam

a recipe from www.maureenabood.com

Your bread will be more successful if you read through the whole recipe before you begin. This bread is made with a wet dough, which creates a large, soft crumb and tender crust. There are a few items and steps that assist in making the bread excellent: let the dough rise its second time on well-oiled, makeshift sheet pans made from non-stick Reynolds Wrap. My cousin Jim discovered that this works like a charm. I agree. This allows the dough to go from its second rise directly into the oven undisturbed. It also provides a thin enough baking surface beneath the bread to allow the right amount of heat, from a pizza stone in the oven, to crisp the bottom of the bread. If you have no pizza stone, try an overturned sheet pan instead (let it heat up as you would a pizza stone). This recipe yields 4 loaves; you can make fewer or more depending on the size you'd like.

1/3 cup sugar

2 packets or 1 tablespoons dry active yeast

7 cups (2 lbs. 3 oz.) unbleached AP flour

1 tablespoon salt

1 ½ cups canola oil

4 ½ cups warm water (80 degrees)

Sesame seeds, toasted or not (optional)

Proof yeast with 1 tablespoon of the sugar and 1/3 cup of the warm water.

With a whisk, combine flour with remaining sugar and salt in a large bowl (one that will accommodate double the amount of dough). Make a well in the center and add the yeast. Slowly begin to combine the flour with the yeast. Use your hands. It feels good.

Slowly add the water, 1 cup at a time, mixing thoroughly after each addition. Hold back on the last cup, adding it in small additions to avoid getting the dough too wet. The dough will be wet and almost batter-like, but still forms its own mass. The dough is not runny. To keep the dough from sticking to the bowl as it rises, coat the bowl with canola oil by lifting the dough and pouring the oil underneath it and rubbing it on the bowl under the dough. Rub the bowl and the top of the dough generously with olive oil.

Cover the bowl thoroughly with plastic wrap to avoid formation of a skin. Cover the bowl with a towel and place in a warm, draft-free environment. An oven that has been barely heated and turned off (don't forget to turn it off!) is an ideal spot. Allow dough to rise until doubled, about 2 hours.

Prepare 4 makeshift sheet pans for baking by folding up four sides on sheets of Reynolds wrap. Pour about 1 tablespoon of canola oil on each sheet and spread around the center of the sheet where the dough will go.

Gently pull pieces of dough off in four loaves and lay them on the prepared pans. The dough will be quite soft and droopy, but take care not to disturb the rise in the dough (the air pockets). Gently rub each loaf generously with more canola oil to coat. Let rise another 30 minutes.

Meanwhile, heat a pizza stone or heavy sheet pan in the lower third of the oven on convection bake to 400 degrees (for non-convection, 425 degrees). If desired, top the loaves with sesame seeds. Use a spray bottle of water to spray the surface of the dough before sprinkling the seeds on; this helps the seeds to adhere.

Transfer the Reynolds sheet to the oven using a pizza peel, a rimless cookie sheet, or the backside of a rimmed baking sheet. Bake the talami for 15- 20 minutes (convection bakes faster than regular baking). If further browning is needed, place under the broiler briefly.

Remove from the oven and please honey, eat it now.