

## **Russian Sweet Bread**

Here it is - the best bread you'll ever taste... from a recipe from Father Robert, a Fransican priest and friend of my parents.

### **Ingredients:**

2 cups warm milk  
1/2 cup sugar  
2 teaspoons salt  
2 pckg. yeast  
7 1/2 cups of bread flour

### **Plus:** (optional)

1/2 stick margarine (sliced into pats)  
2 eggs

### **Wash:**

1 egg  
1 teaspoon water

### **Directions:**

1. Dissolve milk, sugar, salt, and yeast together.
2. Add 3 cups of flour (about one cup at a time).
3. Add the optional ingredients and mix - only if you like. Fr. Robert's naughty twist on the traditional recipe.
4. Knead in the rest of the flour (4 1/2 cups). I've NEVER gotten the full 7 1/2 cups of flour into this dough - my arms just can't do it. I usuall wind up with a-cup-and-then-some left over! Fr. Robert must have Divine assistance - he's a pretty little guy and he can do it!
5. Once you've given up on getting all 7 1/2 cups of flour into the dough, put the ball of dough into an oiled bowl (use your oiled hands to give the dough-ball a coating too - to keep it from drying out), cover, and let it rise in a warm, dry place for 1 hour. I usually soak a kitchen towel in steaming hot water from the tap and then wring it out REALLY well, and cover the bowl with that - then I put it in my oven (turned off - and not having been used yet during the day).
6. Knead. Repeat step five (2nd rise). I've been impatient and skipped this step before. The bread suffers for it. It's a very dense bread anyway, but without the second rise, it's a little too dense.
7. Split the dough into 2 halves, then split each dough-half into thirds - so you can braid the loaves.

8. Put each braided loaf on a baking sheet (non-stick metal is OK, but stoneware is super!). Cover each with the hot, barely damp kitchen towel again and leave to rise for 2 hours. (I put mine back in the turned-off oven - it's the least drafty place in the house!)

9. After 2 hours, remove the covers, wash with the egg and water, and bake at 350 degrees for 45-55 minutes (until golden brown).

As I said, the bread is dense. It's not a light or airy bread at all. Keep it wrapped well - airtight or it will dry out quickly - not that you'll have much left over to worry about. I usually make a double batch (4 loaves) at the holidays because the leftovers make the most unbelievable French Toast you've ever tasted (but we never have leftovers so I have to make some extra!)

Happy Baking!