

Pretzel Bites

- 4 1/2- 5 C flour, divided
- 2 t table (fine) salt
- 1/2 C brown sugar, divided
- 1 1/2 T active dry yeast
- 2 C whole milk
- 4 T sweet (unsalted) butter
- 3 C warm tap water
- 1/4 C baking soda
- Parchment paper
- Kosher salt

Put the milk and butter in a 4 C Pyrex (or other microwave-safe container) and heat for about 1 minute or until the butter melts. The temperature should be around 100 degrees F (too hot will kill the yeast) and if the butter isn't quite melted, move on to the next step while it melts - it will. Alternately, you can heat the two ingredients on the stovetop to the required temp.

In a large bowl or a standing mixer, mix together 2 C flour, salt, 5 T brown sugar, and yeast.

When the milk and butter is at the right temp, stir in the yeast with remaining 1 T of the brown sugar and let it sit for 10 minutes. It should be frothy after 10 minutes if the yeast is active.

Add the liquids to the flour mix and mix well. Add another C of flour and blend (3 cups total so far). Add another 1/2 C and mix well. At this point, remove the dough to a floured surface and blend in remaining dough a handful at a time. Knead and add more flour as necessary. The dough will be just *slightly* tacky and develop craters on its surface (like the moon) when its gluten has been activated. Form into a ball.

Spray oil into a large bowl that is at least twice the size of the dough. Place the dough ball in the bowl and spray its surface slightly. Cover with plastic wrap and place in a warm area that hasn't any air drafts. Stove & oven area countertops are ideal for rising dough but a surface that receives direct sunlight works well,

too. You can also turn on the oven to its lowest setting (200 degrees) for 1 minute, turn it off, and place the bowl in there.

Put the 3 C warm tap water in a large bowl and add the baking soda to it; stir. Cover it with a lid or round baking sheet pan to keep it warm.

Line a large baking sheet pan with parchment paper and scatter kosher salt on it generously. Preheat the oven to 425 degrees.

Remove the dough to a countertop after its size has doubled. Using a metal scraper or large knife, cut the dough in half and divide the halves into fourths (8 total pieces of dough). Take one piece to a working area of the counter and cover the other pieces with the plastic wrap to prevent them from drying out while you work.

Roll a piece into a long rope (around 18" long and 1/2" thick). Using the scraper, cut the rope into 1/2 - 2" pieces. When you cut it, the ends will flare out like a bowtie - just squeeze them slightly back in if you want a uniform look.

Use a large flat mesh strainer (like you'd use for removing fried fish/chicken from the oil) and place the cut pieces on it. Dip them quickly in and out of the water/baking soda mixture and shake off any excess water. Take immediately to the salted parchment paper and place them a half inch apart. Sprinkle kosher salt on the tops quickly before they dry. Continue this process until all the dough is cut.

Bake at 425 degrees about 6 minutes or until browned to your preference.