

Pretzel Croissants

yield: 1 dozen

Note that the dough takes from 24-48 hours from start to the time you form them. The butter block should be formed sometime while the dough is rising. Baked baking soda is an alternative to using lye; it needs 1 hour in the oven (see notes).

for the dough:

1/2 cup (120 ml) lukewarm milk (~110° F)
7 g (1/4 ounce / 2-1/4 teaspoons) active dry yeast
3 tablespoons firmly packed brown sugar (golden or dark)
410 g (3-1/4 cups) unbleached all-purpose flour + more for work surface
2 teaspoons fine sea salt
1 ounce (2 tablespoons) unsalted butter, cubed, at room temp
1/2 cup (120 ml) cold pilsner-style beer

for the butter block:

340 g (12 ounces / 24 tablespoons) cold unsalted butter
2 tablespoons unbleached all-purpose flour

to finish:

60 grams (1/4 cup) baked (see notes) baking soda
1 egg yolk beaten with 1 tablespoon milk
coarse salt
sesame seeds and/or poppy seeds, optional

making the dough:

Stir the yeast and 1 tablespoon of the brown sugar into the lukewarm milk and allow to sit until foamy, 5 minutes or so.

Whisk the flour, remaining brown sugar, and salt in a large bowl. Use your fingertips to rub the butter into the flour mixture, breaking it up into tiny flour-coated pieces the size of breadcrumbs. Stir in the yeast mixture and the beer using a wooden spoon or rubber spatula to form a shaggy mass.

Turn the dough out onto an unfloured work surface and knead eight to ten times, until all of the flour is just incorporated. You don't want to over work it, because you don't want the butter to melt too much. The dough will not be a smooth mass; you will see some flecks of butter. It should be soft and tacky, but not sticky. Adjust as needed with flour or water.

Lightly oil a large bowl and set the dough into it. Cover with plastic wrap. Place in refrigerator for 8 to 24 hours (24 will give you the best flavor).

making the butter block:

Beat the butter and flour together in the bowl of a stand mixer, using the paddle attachment until it forms a smooth mass (or by hand, using a lot of elbow grease). This should take about a minute. You want the butter to be pliable without beating air into it or melting it.

Spread the butter between 2 large sheets of plastic wrap (or parchment or wax paper), and use a rolling pin to shape into a rectangle that is about 8"x9". Use a straight edge to form corners, but work quickly as you want the butter to stay cool. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate until you're ready to roll out the dough.

1st turn:

Scatter a little bit of flour on your work surface, then turn the dough out onto it. Roll it out into a rectangle that is 10"x15" and about 1/4" thick. Using your hands, gently pull and stretch the dough to form straight edges and sharp corners. Brush excess flour off of the dough. Set the dough with a long edge facing you.

Mentally divide the dough into 3 equal portions. Place the butter block over the right 2/3 of the dough, leaving a 1" border on the outer edges. Fold the empty left portion of the dough over the middle third. Now, lift and fold the right section of dough over that. You should have 3 layers of dough that encase 2 layers of butter. Pinch the outsides and the seams together and lightly press the layers together using a rolling pin. This completes the first turn. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate for 1 hour.

2nd turn:

Remove the dough from the fridge and set it on your lightly floured work surface. Roll dough out into a 10"x20" rectangle, pulling and stretching to form straight edges and sharp corners. Brush off any excess flour. Set the dough with a long edge facing you. Fold both of the short ends in to the center, leaving a 1/4" gap where they meet (think of a book jacket). Fold one side of the dough over the other. Lightly press the layers together using a rolling pin, and square and sharpen the edges and corners. This completes the second turn. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate for 1 hour.

3rd (and final) turn:

Lightly dust your work surface and the top of the dough with flour. Roll dough out into a 10" by 15" rectangle. Do another trifold, as done in the first turn (mentally divide into thirds, then fold one third over the center, followed by the last third). Square the edges and sharpen the sides; wipe off excess flour. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate for at least 2 hours, but up to another 24 hours.

(At this point, you can wrap the dough tightly in plastic wrap, slide it into a freezer baggie, and freeze for up to 1 week. Defrost overnight in the refrigerator before proceeding to final shaping.)

final shaping:

Line two rimmed baking sheets with parchment paper and set aside.

Lightly dust your work surface and top of your dough with flour. Roll out into a 15"x18" rectangle that is ~1/4" thick. Pull and stretch to form straight edges and sharp corners. Patch any holes where butter may have popped through by dusting them with flour. Brush any excess flour off the dough.

Cut the rectangle in half lengthwise, creating two 15"x9" sheets of dough. Using a pizza cutter or bench scraper, cut each piece of dough into three equal strips, the short way. Then cut each strip in half diagonally, so that you left with 6 triangles. Repeat with other piece of dough.

Beginning at the base, roll the triangles up, tugging on the tip to elongate it slightly, then gently pressing it into the dough. Place on the prepared baking sheets with the tips tucked under, and curve the ends to form crescent shapes.

Cover the croissants with damp, clean kitchen towels and allow to rise at cool room temperature until they have almost doubled in size and feel spongy, ~2 hours.

At this point, slide the croissants into the refrigerator for 20 minutes while you prepare the dipping solution. Preheat oven to 425° F, positioning one rack in the upper third of the oven, and one in the lower third.

Prepare the dipping solution:

Add the baked baking soda in 8 cups of cold water and stir until completely dissolved. One by one, dip the croissant dough into the dipping solution, allow the excess to drip off, then set back on the lined trays.

Finish them off (finally):

Brush the tops with the egg wash, then sprinkle with coarse salt and sesame seeds or poppy seeds, if using.

Slide into preheated oven immediately and bake for 14-18 minutes (rotating pans from front to back and top to bottom halfway through), until they are deeply browned, crispy, and flaky. They should feel light and airy if you pick them up.

Transfer to a wire rack to cool for 10 minutes before serving. They are best enjoyed the day they are made, ideally warm from the oven. Store any extras in a paper bag for a day. You can reheat them by placing them in a 350° F oven for ~5 minutes.

notes:

Baked baking soda is an alternative to working with lye that still lends pretzels their dark, burnished crust. To make the baked baking soda, spread 1/4 cup (~70 grams) of baking soda out on a baking tray lined with parchment paper or foil (or in a pie pan). It will decrease in weight, but shouldn't decrease in volume. Slide it into an oven that has been preheated to 250° F/120° C and bake for 1 hour. Cool completely, then store in an airtight container at room temperature. If you see lots of pretzels in your future, make a large batch to store since it keeps indefinitely.

(slightly adapted from Pretzel Making at Home by Andrea Slonecker)

Original post can be found on my blog "Notitie van Lien"©2014

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