

Pretzel Bread

1 1/2 cups warm water
1 pkg (or 2 1/4 teas) yeast
2 teas sugar
4 to 4 1/2 cups flour (I used King Arthur unbleached)
2 teas coarse salt
1/4 cup oil or melted butter
1/4 cup baking soda
1 egg, lightly beaten
Additional coarse salt for sprinkling on top

In a mixing bowl, combine the water, yeast and sugar. Allow to stand for 5 minutes, or until foamy. Add the flour, salt and oil or butter. I always start with 4 cups of flour and add more if the dough seems too sticky. Combine well (I use my stand mixer and dough hook for this) and then cover with a towel. Allow to rise in a warm place for about an hour or until doubled.

Remove the dough from the bowl and shape into two small, oval loaves. Place on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Cover with a towel and allow to rise for about 30 minutes.

Bring a large pot of water to boil. Be sure not to fill the pot too full. The weight of the loaves will displace too much water if the pot's too full. When the water starts boiling, add the baking soda. Reduce the heat to a simmer, then *carefully* place one loaf in the pot. Allow to poach for 30 seconds, then gently turn. I use two spatulas to do this, one under each end of the loaf. Poach for another 30 seconds, then remove and put back on the baking sheet. Repeat with the other loaf.

With a sharp knife, slash the top of each loaf a couple of times or make an X. Use a pastry brush to glaze the loaves with the beaten egg, making sure all sides are covered. Sprinkle with coarse salt.

Bake at 425 degrees for 20-25 minutes, until browned.

Cool before slicing. An electric bread knife works better than a regular bread knife because of the crust.