Cinnamon Raisin Bread

Cinnamon raisin bread has roots in several older bread traditions rather than one single invention.

Raisin breads have been made for centuries in Europe and the Middle East, where dried fruits were commonly added to enriched breads for sweetness, preservation, and celebration. In medieval and early modern Europe, breads with raisins, currants, spices, eggs, butter, or milk were often served on feast days or special occasions because ingredients like sugar, cinnamon, and dried fruit were more expensive than everyday flour and grain.

Cinnamon itself has an even older history. It was traded from South and Southeast Asia through ancient spice routes and became highly prized in Europe. By the 1600s and 1700s, cinnamon was increasingly used in baked goods as global trade expanded, especially in sweet breads, cakes, and holiday loaves.

The combination of cinnamon and raisins became especially common in Northern and Western European baking traditions. Similar breads include German and Dutch raisin breads, British fruit loaves, Scandinavian spiced breads, and Jewish challah-style or babka-like breads with dried fruit and spice. Immigrants brought many of these traditions to North America.

In the United States, cinnamon raisin bread became widely popular in the 19th and 20th centuries as home baking, commercial bakeries, and sliced sandwich bread became more common. By the mid-20th century, it was a familiar breakfast bread, often toasted and served with butter. Its appeal came from being slightly sweet, aromatic, and versatile—special enough to feel like a treat but simple enough for everyday meals.

Today, cinnamon raisin bread exists in many forms: soft sandwich loaves, sourdough versions, braided breads, swirl breads, whole grain loaves, and artisan bakery styles. It remains popular because it connects two long-standing food traditions: spiced sweet breads and fruit-enriched breads.