

Joan Nathan's Fennel & Orange-Scented Challah

(with notes by Sandra Harris of [Raincoast Creative Salon](#))

Makes 2 loaves (*I halve the recipe if it's only the 3 of us for Friday night dinner*).

1 ½ tablespoons (2 packages) active dry yeast

1 tablespoon plus 1/3 cup sugar

Grated zest from 2 large oranges plus 1/2 cup of the juice, strained (*I use Cara Cara oranges as the flavor and scent are so lovely!*)

⅓ cup vegetable or canola oil

3 large eggs, plus 1 egg yolk

1 tablespoon salt

7 ½ cups unbleached all-purpose flour, plus more as needed

1 tablespoon fennel seeds (*you might not be a fan of the licorice flavor of fennel but trust me, it's subtle and it works so well with the orange*)

2 teaspoons poppy seeds

2 teaspoons roasted sesame seeds

In the bowl of a standing mixer, dissolve yeast and 1 tablespoon sugar in 1 cup of lukewarm water. (*I do this bit in a small bowl. I also use an instant read thermometer to test that the water is 110F. I find that's perfect for the yeast*).

Using the paddle attachment, stir orange zest, juice and oil into yeast mixture, then add 2 eggs, 1 at a time, and remaining sugar and salt. (*add the sugar and salt together because if you dump the salt in directly, it'll kill the yeast*). Switch to the dough hook and gradually

add 6 cups of flour, kneading for about 5 minutes and adding more flour as needed to make a slightly sticky, smooth and elastic dough.

Grease a large bowl, turn dough into it and then turn the dough over to grease the top. Cover with greased plastic wrap and let rise in a warm place for 1 hour, or refrigerate for a few hours or overnight. (*If you can, do it overnight – the flavor will have more depth*).

When the dough has almost doubled, punch it down, remove it to a lightly floured counter, knead it briefly until smooth and divide it in half. (*I do this on a silpat so I don't need the flour. Adding extra through kneading can make it tough*). Roll each piece into a cylinder about 27 inches long, making sure there are no seams in the dough. Bring one end of the dough up to the other and twist to form a spiral. Push both ends together to make a squat 12-inch loaf. Repeat with other piece of dough and arrange loaves on a parchment-lined baking sheet at least 2 inches apart. You can also twist the long spirals into a circle if you like; the dough is very malleable.

Beat remaining egg and egg yolk and brush about half the mixture on the loaves, reserving the rest. Let the dough rise uncovered another half-hour or overnight in refrigerator.

If dough was refrigerated, bring to room temperature. Heat oven to 350 degrees and in a small bowl, combine fennel, poppy and sesame seeds. Brush the loaves with egg again and sprinkle with seeds. Bake for 35 to 40 minutes or until golden and firm when tapped with a spatula. (*I use my instant read thermometer again and remove the challah when the interior temperature is 190F*).

Cool on a rack. (*do this so the bottom doesn't get soggy*).