

Date Caramel Babka | SCRAPS by Carolina Gelen

Prep: 40 minutes, plus 3 hours proofing | Cook: 40 minutes | Total: 4 hours 20 minutes | Makes 8 to 12 servings

Babka Dough

- 5g (1 1/2 teaspoons) active dry yeast
- 146g (2/3 cup) lukewarm whole milk
- 38g (3 tablespoons) granulated sugar
- 3 egg yolks
- 10g (1 tablespoon) vanilla extract
- 1g (1/4 teaspoon) ground cinnamon
- 275g (2 cups and 3 tablespoons) bread flour
- 8g (2 teaspoons) kosher salt
- 75g (5 tablespoons) unsalted butter, room temperature
- 30g (1/4 cup) bread flour
- Extra-virgin olive oil or neutral oil, such as grape seed oil or sunflower seed oil, for greasing your hands and the bowl

Date Caramel

- 160g (about 10) pitted Medjool dates
- 4g (1 teaspoon) kosher salt
- 100g (1/2 cup) dark brown sugar
- 1g (1/4 teaspoon) ground cinnamon
- 75g (5 tablespoons) unsalted butter, room temperature

Egg Wash

- 1 egg
- 2 tablespoons water

Syrup

- 40g (3 tablespoons) granulated sugar
- 45g (3 tablespoons) water
- Any flavorings of choice, such as a splash of whiskey, a teaspoon of vanilla extract or orange blossom water, optional

Make the babka dough:

1. In a medium bowl, combine the yeast and lukewarm milk. Add the sugar, yolks, vanilla, cinnamon and whisk until combined.
2. Add the 275g (2 cups and 3 tablespoons) of flour to the liquids. Add the salt and gently stir the salt in the flour to evenly distribute. Roughly mix everything using a wooden spoon or Dutch whisk until a shaggy dough is formed.

3. Using a bench scraper, dump the dough on your counter/work surface. Lightly oil your hands and give the dough a rough knead to bring it together — the dough will be very sticky, a bench scraper will make your job a lot easier.
4. Once you have an evenly mixed, but still sticky dough, add the room temperature butter on top. Squeeze the dough and butter together to incorporate the butter in the dough. Again, it's going to be sticky.
5. Once the butter has been incorporated in the dough, sprinkle the remaining 30g (1/4 cup flour) on top of the sticky dough. Lightly oil your hands and start kneading. At first, the dough will feel sticky, but slowly get less and less sticky as you knead. Knead for 5 to 7 minutes, until the dough looks smooth, feels easy to handle and can easily be shaped into a ball. Use a bench scraper to lift the dough off the work surface in the beginning. Shape the dough into a ball.
6. Lightly oil the mixing bowl. Add the dough, cover with plastic wrap and proof for 1 1/2 to 2 hours, in a warm spot, until the dough is visibly larger in size, almost doubled. This will take more or less time depending on the temperature of your kitchen.

Make the date caramel:

1. To a medium bowl, add the dates. Cover the dates with boiling hot water and set aside for 10 to 15 minutes.
2. Drain the dates and give them a squeeze to get rid of any excess liquid. Using a food processor or immersion blender, blend the dates into a smooth paste.
3. Add the date paste back to the bowl, add the salt, sugar, cinnamon and mix until combined. Add the butter and vigorously mix until combined. Set aside while the dough is still proofing.

Assemble the babka:

1. Lightly flour your work surface, kitchen counter, table, etc. dump the dough onto the surface and roughly shape it into a rectangle. Using a rolling pin, roll the dough into a 12 x 14 1/2-inch (30 x 36-cm) rectangle, about 1 cm thick.
2. Evenly spread the date caramel all over the surface of the dough using a spatula. Going lengthwise, tightly roll the dough to form a log.
3. If the dough feels greasy and soft at this point, chill the dough log on a plate or baking sheet lined with parchment, in the fridge for 10 to 15 minutes. It will be easier to handle.
4. Lightly grease with oil and line with parchment an 8 x 4-inch (20 x 10-cm) loaf pan. A larger loaf pan will work as well.
5. Using a sharp knife or bench scraper, slice the dough in half, lengthwise, forming 2 strips of stuffed swirly dough.
6. Twist the two strips of dough together 2 or 3 times to form a chunky loaf of dough.
7. Place the dough in the loaf pan and cover with plastic wrap. Proof for 1 1/2 to 2 hours, until puffed up and visibly larger in size, almost doubled.

8. Chill the loaf in the fridge for 5 to 10 minutes, or until the caramel is solid to the touch, this will make it easier to egg wash.
9. Heat the oven to 375°F (190°C).

Make the egg wash:

1. In a small bowl, crack the egg. Add the water and whisk everything until combined. Using a pastry brush, or your fingers, brush the egg wash all over the babka surface.
2. Bake the babka until golden and glossy on top and the center measures 185°F to 190°F, about 40 to 50 minutes. Keep an eye on it, the babka will turn darker in color on top. As soon as the color on top starts getting darker, after 15 to 20 minutes, depending on the oven, place a sheet of aluminum foil on top to prevent it from getting any darker.

Make the syrup:

1. In a small pot, heat the sugar and water together. Simmer until the sugar has dissolved. Brush the syrup over the warm babka.
2. Allow the babka to cool to room temperature, then serve.