

Salt and Serenity

Almond Joy Babka (Chocolate, Coconut and Almonds)

Adapted from Yotam Ottolenghi and Sami Tamimi's recipe for Chocolate Krantz cakes (Chocolate Babkas) in their lovely book, "*Jerusalem: A Cookbook*".

Makes 2 Babkas

Dough

4 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups all-purpose flour (only 4 cups of flour go into mixer at beginning, the extra $\frac{1}{4}$ cup is added at a later stage in mixing)

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup granulated sugar

2 teaspoons quick rise (instant) dry yeast

Zest of 1 clementine or $\frac{1}{2}$ an orange (optional)

3 large eggs

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup water, room temperature

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon kosher salt

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup (5.3 ounces) unsalted butter, at room temperature, cut into $\frac{3}{4}$ inch cubes

Vegetable oil, for greasing pan

Almond Joy filling

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup icing sugar

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup cocoa powder

4 ounces bittersweet (not unsweetened) dark chocolate, melted

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup unsalted butter, melted

$\frac{2}{3}$ cup almonds, toasted and coarsely chopped

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup unsweetened shredded coconut

1 Tablespoon granulated sugar

Sugar syrup

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup water

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup plus 2 Tablespoons granulated sugar

1. Make the dough: Place 4 cups of flour, sugar, yeast, and clementine zest in a stand mixer fitted with the dough hook and mix on low speed for 1 minute. Add the eggs and water and mix on low speed for a few seconds, then increase the speed to medium and mix for 3 minutes, until the dough comes together.

2. Add the salt and then start adding the butter, a few cubes at a time, mixing until it is incorporated into the dough. Continue mixing for about 10 minutes on medium speed, until the dough is completely smooth, elastic, and shiny. During the mixing, scrape down the sides of the bowl a few times and add 1 tablespoon of additional flour at a time, so that the sides of the mixing bowl become clean.
3. Place the dough in a large bowl brushed with vegetable oil, cover with plastic wrap, and leave in the fridge overnight.
4. Grease two loaf pans (8½ x 4½ or 9 x 5 inches) with some sunflower oil and line each pan with parchment paper. (Check out this link for the easiest way to line a pan with parchment paper: <https://youtu.be/PjtclYYTnyc>)
5. Divide the dough in half and keep one-half covered in the fridge.
6. Make the filling: Mix together the icing sugar, cocoa powder, melted chocolate, and butter to form a paste. Roll out the dough on a lightly floured surface into a rectangle measuring 15 by 11 inches. Trim the sides to make them straight. Position the dough so that a short side is closest to you. Use an offset spatula to spread half the chocolate mixture over the rectangle, leaving a ¾-inch border all around. Sprinkle half the almonds on top of the chocolate, and then sprinkle with half the coconut and half of the sugar.
7. Brush a little bit of water along the short end farthest away from you. Use both hands to roll up the rectangle like a roulade, starting from the short side that is closest to you. Press to seal the dampened end of the roll. Use both hands to even out the roll into a perfect thick cigar. Rest the cigar on its seam on a parchment lined baking sheet and freeze for 15 minutes.
8. Trim about ¾ inch off both ends of the roulade with a serrated knife. Now use the knife to gently cut the roll into half lengthwise, starting at the top and finishing at the seam. You are essentially dividing the log into two long even halves, with the layers of dough and filling visible along the length of both halves. With the cut sides facing up, gently press together one end of each half, and then lift the right half over the left half. Repeat this process, but this time, lift the left half over the right, to create a simple, two strand braid. Continue until you have finished braiding.

9. Gently squeeze the other end together so that you are left with the two halves, intertwined, showing the filling on top. Carefully lift the babka into the lined loaf pan. Cover the pan with a wet tea towel and leave to rise in a warm place for 60-90 minutes. The babka will only rise by 10 to 20 percent. Repeat the whole process to form the second babka.
10. Preheat the oven to 375°F. Remove the tea towels, place the cakes on the middle rack of the oven, and bake for about 35-40 minutes, until a skewer inserted in the center comes out clean. (Or check with an instant read thermometer. The dough should register 180°F in the thickest part of the babka.)
11. While the cakes are in the oven, make the syrup. Combine the water and sugar in a saucepan, place over medium heat, and bring to a boil. As soon as the sugar dissolves, remove from the heat and leave to cool down. As soon as the cakes come out of the oven, brush the syrup over them. Leave the cakes until they are just warm, then remove them from the pans and let cool on a wire rack completely before serving.