

Salt and Serenity

Fig, Olive, and Halloumi Babka

Makes 1 loaf

Dough recipe and method is adapted from America's test Kitchen. Filling recipe comes from my imagination!

Dough:

350 grams bread flour

5 grams rapid-rise yeast

1 1/3 grams whole or 2% milk, room temperature

2 large eggs, room temperature

12 grams sugar

3 grams Diamond Crystal Kosher salt

85 grams unsalted butter, cut into 1-inch cubes and softened

Filling:

20 grams za'atar

150 grams halloumi cheese, grated on large holes of box grater

70 grams mozzarella cheese, grated on large holes of box grater

85 grams dried mission figs, cut into 1/4-inch pieces

60 grams olives (I used a mix of Kalamata and [Castelvetrano](#) olives), pitted and cut into 1/4-inch dice

1 Tablespoon honey

Assembly:

1 large egg, whisked with 1 teaspoon water

2 teaspoons za'atar

1. **Make babka dough:** Whisk flour and yeast together in bowl of stand mixer. Add milk and eggs. Using paddle attachment on medium-low speed, mix until dough forms and no dry flour remains, 2 to 4 minutes, scraping down sides of bowl with rubber spatula as needed. Turn off mixer, cover bowl with dish towel or plastic wrap, and let dough stand for 15 minutes.
2. Switch to dough hook attachment. Add sugar and salt to dough and knead on medium speed until incorporated, about 30 seconds. Increase speed to medium-high and, with mixer running, add butter, 1 piece at a time, allowing each piece to incorporate before adding next, about 3 minutes total, scraping down dough hook and sides of bowl as needed. Continue to knead on medium-high speed until dough begins to pull away from sides of bowl, 7 to 10 minutes, scraping down bowl as needed.
3. Transfer dough to greased large bowl. Cover tightly with plastic and let rise until slightly puffy, about 1 hour. Refrigerate until firm, at least 2 hours or up to 24 hours.
4. Grease 9x5 inch loaf pan with cooking spray. Press down on dough to deflate, then transfer to lightly floured counter and press and roll dough into 18x7-inch rectangle, with short side parallel to counter edge. Sprinkle dough evenly with 2 Tablespoons za'atar. Evenly distribute grated halloumi and mozzarella over the surface of the dough. Distribute dried fig pieces and diced olives evenly over the surface. Use your palms to press all the ingredients into the dough. Drizzle with honey.
5. Roll dough away from you into firm cylinder and pinch seam and ends closed. Wrap in plastic; transfer to rimmed baking sheet; and refrigerate until firm but still supple, about 30 minutes.

6. Transfer chilled dough log to lightly floured counter with short side facing you. Using bench scraper or sharp knife, cut log in half lengthwise. Turn dough halves cut side up and arrange side by side. Gently stretch each half into 14-inch length, then pinch top 2 ends of strips together to seal. Twist strips tightly by gently lifting left strip of dough over right strip of dough. Repeat, keeping cut side up, until all of dough is twisted. Pinch bottom ends together to seal.
7. Transfer loaf, cut side up, to prepared pan, reshaping as needed to fit into pan. Cover loaf loosely with greased plastic and let rise until almost doubled in size, 1 to 1½ hours (top of loaf should rise about 1 inch over lip of pan).
8. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350°F. Gently brush loaf with egg wash; sprinkle with remaining za'atar; and bake until loaf is deep golden brown and registers 190°F to 195°F with an instant read thermometer, 40 to 55 minutes, rotating pan halfway through baking. If top of loaf gets too brown during baking, tent with a piece of foil. Let loaf cool in pan on wire rack for 1 hour. Remove loaf from pan and let cool completely on wire rack, about 3 hours, before serving.