

# Bulgarian Easter Bread or Kozunak

Revised edition

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## About the Authors

Hello dear reader, the following guide is intended to be a simple and yet concise instruction manual on preparing Bulgarian Easter Bread. The writing of this guide started around the beginning of 2011 and was then written by me Petko Komsalov as a simple set of instructions for the making of the recipe that I distributed to friends. Since then the recipe has been slowly tweaked to perfection with the help of my father Krastyo Komsalov and as you will see there is everything inside to ensure that anyone can enjoy a homemade Kozunak as long as he has a dough making machine (or hands if not) and few simple utensils. The guide is separated in three distinct pieces: a list of the ingredients and preparations necessary, instructions for the making of the bread and finally a troubleshooting section useful if something goes awry. My hope is that whoever finds this recipe succeeds in his endeavor of making Kozunak bread. Feel free to mail any suggestions or improvements to the following address your efforts will be acknowledged. Good Luck!

## Ingredients and Utensils

First find a bread baking foil container, here is mine (a must have). It is where you will deposit the long bread, let it rise few times and then bake it. The bottom will be oiled so that the bread doesn't stick after it is baked



The purpose of the above foil container is to hold the bread constricted from both sides allowing the final bread to rise in the right direction (namely upward). My container illustrated on the last page was made by twisting a rectangular aluminum baking plate (largest size) that was bought for 2 bucks at a Dollarama store. The diameter is 18cm and the length is 60cm (the plate was 60cm long and 22cm wide before I twisted both ends through the long middle axis). Make sure you find a proper similar container before you start or you will find that executing the final steps in the preparation is hard. Notice, that in the second picture on the right, there is a light thin cloth. It is used to cover the container so you can have a higher moisture level during the final rising of the dough. Also sometimes in order to get at 30°C I would preheat my oven for 50 seconds in order to just raise by 10°C the temperature inside (turn the oven off after the 50 seconds or you'll kill the dough BAD) and then I'll put the covered container inside the oven to let it rise. You may add some water in the oven as well so that the humidity is high. Make sure though that the temperature is not above 30°C or you will kill the yeast.

Here is the remainder of the ingredients in exact amounts (note this is a sensitive recipe and all must be exact):

300 ml (3% Milk).

3 eggs (medium).

750 gr flour (needs to be exact), I use Baker's Hood Bleached Enriched.

140 gr of sugar.

3 to 4 tea spoons of yeast. (Quick Raise for bread machines is the best).

80gr of butter.

Vanilla extract (on taste about 2 spoons based on concentration).

1 tea spoon of salt.

Dry raisins about 2 handfuls held with both hands (use yellow golden raisins average size).

3 to 4 soup spoons of wheat gluten (is found in most grocery stores).

(Lastly at the end you will need some egg yolk 1 or 2 yolks mixed as well as some brown sugar and a little extra milk for the yolks).

Also have 2-3 clean thin leather towels at hand so you can cover the freshly baked bread for 30 minutes before eating some of it or packaging it.



## Instructions

The mixture in the following steps will be prepared inside the bread machine container so there is no need to mix anything besides when indicated,

Warm the 300 ml of milk to about 25 to 30°C and add to it 2 spoons of sugar (from the 140 gr) and 2 (of the 3) spoons of yeast. Mix (manually) and dissolve the sugar and yeast present in the milk and let the whole incubate for about 10 minutes. Add to the mixture the 3 eggs directly. Add to the mixture the vanilla extract. Melt the 80 gr of butter (45 sec in microwave inside a little cup) do not overheat just melt. Add the melted butter to the mix. Add the 750 gr of flour, the remaining sugar (from the 140 gr), the 1 tea spoon of salt, the wheat gluten and the last spoon of yeast.

Insert the bread machine container filled with the above ingredients inside the bread machine and initiate the bread dough making program (this program only plows the dough and

lets it rise, but doesn't bake it). As the cycle completes the mixing section (30 min) and prepares for the incubation abort the program (since you want only the mixing part from the bread machine). Now restart the same program so that after 5-10 minutes the bread can get another 30 minute section of hard mixing. When around 10 minutes are left for the second mixing cycle to complete add all the raisins (2 handfuls, you should have 50 min of mixing behind you and 10 min more to go). Let the program complete this time without aborting it allowing the dough to rise, but don't let it stand inside until it hits the cover. Basically you run the program twice for an hour of mixing letting it complete itself the second time with the incubation so the dough can grow inside the machine. The dough will now be highly fibrous and elastic and it should be possible to knead it.

Once this is done take the dough out without paying attention to squishing it a little since this won't be the final incubation and rising (let it loose about 1 quarter to 1 sixth of its volume). Plow (knead) the dough shortly to shape it so that you get a fat rod shape (like a fat bacterium). Cut the dough with a sharp knife at 2 places at equal intervals in order to create 3 equal pieces (like this (---) | (---) | (---)).



Elongate the three pieces gently by letting the gravity do the job (let one end hover in the air while you hold the other end make sure you are not breaking too much the gummy fibrous dough) or by gently kneading them. Each long piece should be identical in length and thickness, this is important; you should have 3 long fibers that are about 8 cm in diameter throughout their length of about 50-60 cm.



Now you must braid the three long pieces in order to form the hallmark shape of the bread (note as you braid make sure torsion is applied on the elastic dough but the fiber is not broken the cooked bread should be fibrous and the direction of kneading should be apparent within it). Here are some pictures explaining braiding and showing how the bread should look.



fig. 1



fig. 2



fig. 3



fig. 4



fig. 5



fig. 6

← This is how you will braid the three pieces, as you braid them deposit the braided end in the preoiled long foil container (first page↑). After this is done cover the foil container with the wet cloth and put the whole to incubate at 25-30°C (I do this in the oven very risky). The bread should be complete and risen to its 2 to 3 times larger full size in about 2 hours, but time may vary so pay attention to it every hour or so. The total time it takes to rise to completion (x2.5 larger) is 2-4 hours.

Justin McInteer, Autry National Center.



← Somewhat fugly ends make sure you connect in a prettier manner, but overall good example especially in the midsection. The bread should have a length of about 35 to 40 cm so it can fit nicely in your container and have sufficient room for longitudinal growth.

As you braid the three long pieces ensure that the forming bread is deposited inside your foil container since this is where the final rising will occur not on a flat surface as seen in the picture (as your bread will rise kind of flat in all directions, believe me). Now that this is done cover with the wet cloth the foil container and put the bread for the second longer and last rising at 25-30°C (I do this in the oven very risky). Each 1 hour open the oven and lift the cloth so that you can verify how much the bread has risen and then recover it and close the oven. Make sure

the temperature inside never exceeds 30°C and that the oven is turned off (only a quick preheat, before the foil container with the bread is put in, is needed). The rising might take a lot of time due to the characteristics of the dough.

2-4 Hours Later (Some people even suggest overnight)

Now that the 3 bread pieces are braided together and the bread has risen you will need to complete some final modifications to the surface of the bread (yolk brushing and decoration) before putting it the preheated oven (180°C). First you must break 1 or 2 eggs carefully and separate the yolk (yellow ball) from the egg white and then break it and mix it (only yolk). Now add some milk to the thick yolk mush in order to get a slightly less viscous consistency that can be used to brush the bread's surface. Use a large brush (I use a clean paint brush) preferably and be extremely careful not to hurt the surface of the risen bread or it may puff and blow and the whole recipe will be ruined (which is very frustrating).



After this is done sprinkle the yolky damp surface with brown or even white sugar, don't just throw a ton, or the sugar may start burning when you bake (use an average amount and judgment). Here is a picture of the bread at this stage with the brushing and sprinkling complete.



← Good containers, buy something like this if you want. Make sure though that size is 18cm wide and 60cm long or you will need to make two or more smaller breads, which is not recommended.

Now that your bread has risen (second final time), is carefully covered with egg yolk, has been sprinkled with sugar (some people also add other decorations like poppy flower seeds etc), you are ready to proceed with the baking. Baking is a touchy part due to the large amount of sugar used inside the dough and sprinkled on the surface. The bread can basically be raw at one instant then cooked 5 minutes later and then another 5 minutes later it can be completely burned, pay attention to it. The baking happens at 180°C inside a preheated oven and takes about 45

minutes you won't need the cloth at this point since it will burn if you accidentally left it covering the container (stupid, but possible). Proceed to the 20<sup>th</sup> minute of baking and at this point cover the bread without taking it out of the oven with foil paper in order to prevent excessive baking of the surface or burning (note this is important as soon as the surface has a desired appearance cover the foil container with the aluminum paper).



The aluminum foil should have the following specifics: 70cm long and 30cm wide. When covering just spread the rectangular foil paper on the surface of the container, don't burn yourself trying to tightly cover, just throw it on top in a logical shape and way. At this point you should have 25 minutes to go until the bread is complete do frequent checks by lifting the foil cover. In the last 5 minutes based on judgment you can lower the temperature to 170°C in order to extend the baking time by few minutes so that your bread doesn't burn on top and is not raw within.

After the bread is cooked take it out of the oven removing the foil cover and taking the container outside. Careful at this point, if you got that far you will notice that the bread is long

hot and soft. In order to take it out of the container a lot of precise movements must be used. If you feel it is impossible cover the container on top with 2 or 3 towels. If you took the whole bread out then wove it inside the 2 or 3 towels. Keep the bread covered in towels for about 30 minutes and then cut it in 2 halves or many thin (1-2 cm) pieces. Package it or eat as much as you want with Yogurt as a side dish and enjoy your success. Good Luck!!!



### **Troubleshooting**

My dough did not have the proper consistency. → Make sure you use a precise balance and follow the recipe well.

The dough is dead and refuses to grow. → You either added too much sugar or salt, which kills the dough, or you forgot to turn the oven off during one of the incubations in case you used the oven. This means the yeast got heated and died.

The dough is growing well but in all directions and the final bread lacks esthetics. → Try using a better tighter and more appropriate container or if the dough consistency is viscous use more flour let us say 755 gr next time. Note even flour humidity may be an important factor.

Rising occurs, but is slow. → Augment moisture and temperature, also the yeast may be dying due too much sugar/salt (or maybe your yeast starter is old).

Bread burned. → Use lower temperature cover well and check it every 2 minutes at the end.