

Easter Ham Baked in Bread Dough



Author: Monika Topolko

Serves 6-8

Prep time: 40min + proofing time and ham chilling time

Cook time: 1h 40min

Total time: 2h 20min

Difficulty: Intermediate

Category: Breakfast, Croatian cuisine, Meat, Yeasted breads

Cuisine: Croatian

Ham baked in bread dough is a traditional Croatian delicacy. Together with Pinca and Easter eggs, it represents the centerpiece of the family Easter breakfast. The bread dough is usually made with only all-purpose flour, but I like to add some whole wheat flour to give it a more rustic look and taste. The ham needs to be cooked and cooled before it is wrapped with the bread dough and then baked in the oven. It's best to cook the ham the night before and proceed with *trecepe* next morning.

Ingredients

1-1.5 kg boneless smoked ham

20 grams fresh yeast

1 teaspoon sugar

400 grams all-purpose flour

100 grams whole wheat flour

1 teaspoon salt

300-350 ml warm water

Directions

Place the ham into a pot and cover with water. Bring to the boil and simmer for approximately 40 minutes. Remove from heat and let it cool in the water over night. Next morning, drain the ham and discard the skin and fat.

For the bread, proof the yeast by mixing it with some warm water and a teaspoon of sugar. Let it stand for a few minutes in a warm place until it becomes foamy. Meanwhile, mix both flours and salt in a bowl with a wooden spoon. Incorporate the yeast mixture to the flour. Mix with an electric mixer (paddle attachments) and gradually add warm water until you obtain a dough that detaches itself from the edges of the bowl. You may need a bit more or less water, depending on the quality of flour. The dough will be firm but sticky, but don't worry. Cover the bowl with a plastic wrap and a clean kitchen cloth and let it rise in a warm place until it doubles in volume (30-45 minutes). Transfer the dough onto a floured surface and knead lightly for a minute or two, and then return it to the bowl. Cover with plastic and a cloth and let it rise again until it doubles in volume. Repeat this process 2 times.

After the dough has risen three times, you can proceed to form the bread. On a floured surface, roll the dough into a rectangle about 2cm thick. Put the ham in the middle, wrap the dough around it and seal it. If necessary, brush some water on the dough to help it stick together and pinch it with your fingers to help it seal. Transfer to a parchment covered baking sheet seam side down, cover with a cloth and let rise for 30-40 minutes.

Preheat the oven to 180°C. Just before you put the bread in, sprinkle some water over the oven to create steam. Immediately put the bread in and close the oven door. Every 15 minutes during the baking time, sprinkle some more water into the oven to create additional steam. Steam helps the crust stay thin and

crispy, rather than thick and hard to chew. Bake for 1 hour or until the crust is nice and golden. Wrap the hot bread into a damp cloth and let it cool completely. Wrapped into a cloth and a plastic bag, the bread will stay fresh for couple of days.