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**Children Learn the Twists and Turns of Making Challah**

By Cathy Dausman



Orinda's Charlee Spence adds the proper twist to her Challah loaf.

Photos Cathy Dausman

A standard Challah bread recipe calls for oil, salt, flour, yeast, eggs and water, but a child-specific Challah bake includes an abundance of flour dust, sticky fingers and laughter.

Twenty-seven children and 14 adults recently dove wrist deep into Chabad of Lamorinda's Kids Mega Challah Bake at Lafayette Library and Learning Center. The list of those wish-

ing to participate had simply outgrown its original site, Rabbi Yisroel Labowski's home.

In the simplest form Challah is a loaf of bread, but its significance dates back two millennia, the Rabbi and his wife Tzipora explained. Challah is special Jewish braided bread eaten on Sabbath and during holidays. Jewish families making bread two thousand years ago were commanded to offer a small piece of their dough to the priest in the Holy Temple.

"We want to teach the children the mitzvah (good deed) of making bread," Labowski explained. "Today, there is no temple." Tzipora explained to the crowd, "but we do have the bread."

Participants donned plastic aprons, gloves and paper hats, combined wet and dry ingredients and began to stir. The wooden spatula was abandoned when the stirring got tough and sticky fingers took up the kneading. The dough was allowed to rise before each baker separated and rolled pieces. One participant observed the bread braiding process was not unlike braiding her sister's hair.

The braided loaf was taken home where it would be coated with egg whites, perhaps decorated with poppy or sesame seeds, then baked and served after recit-

ing a blessing. Those too timid to bake can find Challah loaves at Trader Joe's and Whole Foods, Lafayette, and Oakland's Grand Bakery (through Dec. 23) or

ble. Hanukkah begins at sundown December 24 this year.

There will be a Mega Challah Bake at 7 p.m. Dec. 15 at the Lafayette Veterans Memorial Building.

**MEGA CHALLAH** BAKE

**Tonight's Challah Recipe**  
*(for groups of 2)*

**Ingredients:**

- 1 ¼ tablespoons yeast
- 3 cups water
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 4 egg yolks
- 1/2 cup oil
- 1 tablespoon + pinch salt
- Approx. 9 cups flour

Yields 4 medium sized Challot

**In bowl, dissolve yeast in warm water. Add sugar, let stand 2 minutes, until it starts slightly bubbling.**

**Crack eggs (check to ensure no blood spots). Add yolks & mix.**

**Add oil and salt, mix well.**

**Gradually add flour 1-2 cups at a time, mixing well after each addition. As mixture becomes stiff, flour your hands and begin kneading until dough is smooth & elastic, not sticky.**



Front, from left, Rebecca Johnson, Kayla Smith, Tamar Links, Max Freeman; rear, from left, Rachel Valentine, Charlee Spence, Julia Johnson, Beatrice Hearey, Alyssa Smith

*Thoughtful Food*

**Terrific Toffee for the Holidays**

By Susie Iventosch



Delicious holiday toffee doesn't have to be difficult to make.

Photos Susie Iventosch

I usually shy away from making toffee at home because I've failed at it numerous times. It has turned out chewy, or burned, or even completely separated by cooking it to the point of no return. I usually just wait for my neighbor, Paula, to make her annual holiday trek bearing tins of her awesome toffee. I heed the warning: Don't try this at home. So, when my son asked me to teach him how to make toffee this year, I was reluctant, nervous really. How about making croissants, like your sister wanted to do?

But, when the next gens ask you to teach them how to cook something, I believe you have to give it your best shot. Well, try we did, and although I was skeptical to the very end, we were both extremely pleased

with the outcome. Maybe it was his magic touch, or perhaps the marble slab we used, or maybe even the fact this recipe does not call for water, but our toffee turned out to be one of the best either of us had ever tasted. It was crunchy just like it's supposed to be, and the dark chocolate and toasted nuts were a great compliment.

I hope you have as much luck as we did on our batch. It may really just have been pure luck this time, but it has given me hope to try it again!

If you plan to make this toffee, be sure to have an accurate candy thermometer and the patience to try again, if at first you don't succeed.

**INGREDIENTS**

- 2 cups salted butter
- 2 cups white sugar
- Dash salt
- 2 cups dark or bittersweet chocolate chips
- ½ cup chopped pecans, toasted
- ½ cup sliced or chopped almonds, toasted

**DIRECTIONS**

Prepare a large baking sheet by lining it with either parchment paper or foil, or better yet, if you have a marble slab, that is a fantastic surface for letting the toffee set up after it's cooked.

Toast both the pecans and almonds on a baking sheet in a 400-degree oven, or in a dry frying pan over medium-high heat, until they are browned and become fragrant, approximately 5-7 minutes. Set aside. (We toasted them separately, so we could use one kind of nut on each half of the toffee, but you could certainly mix the two nuts, if you'd like to.)

Place butter, sugar and salt in a heavy large pot. Cook over medium heat, stirring with a wooden spoon until the butter melts. Then, bring the mixture to a boil and continue to cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally and gently, until the temperature reaches 285 degrees and it turns to a dark amber color. This may take a while, especially if your burner is on the lower side of medium. We checked the temperature frequently with the candy thermometer. Once our candy reached 285 degrees, we cooked it just another minute or so to get the right color, but here is where you and run the risk of overcooking and burning it or separating it, so tread lightly at this point. You want to cook until it reaches the right temperature and the right color, but without separating or burning.

Once you've reached the right color and temperature, pour the mixture out onto your prepared surface. Evenly sprinkle the chocolate chips over the toffee and as they melt, spread with a spatula to cover entire surface. Immediately sprinkle with nuts and press nuts into the chocolate, using your hand or a spatula.

Cool toffee completely, and then break into pieces. Store in an airtight container. Actually, you might not have to worry about storing ... it will be gone before you know it!

Have fun and good luck!



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