

Cardamom Bread

adapted from my

Grandma Alice

makes 2 loaves

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup milk

1/3 cup sugar

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup butter, cut into small pieces

1 teaspoon cardamom, coarsely ground

2 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoons yeast (or one package)

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup warm water

1 egg

4- 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups all-purpose flour

Swedish Pearl Sugar (see note)

1/3 cup raisins (optional)

Egg white

Combine sugar, salt, and butter in a medium size bowl. Scald the milk and pour over the mixture. Stir occasionally until butter is melted and mixture has cooled slightly. Add cardamom.

In a separate bowl, sprinkle yeast on warm water, stir to dissolve.

In a large bowl, combine milk mixture, yeast mixture, egg, and 1 cup of flour. Beat well until smooth. Add raisins if using. Add remaining flour until dough is still supple, but not sticky. Knead 5 minutes (or less if you are using a mixer).

Remove dough to an oiled bowl. Cover and let rise until doubled (1 hour or so). Punch down and let rest 10 minutes. Divide dough into 6 equal parts. (The key to a nice looking braid is starting with the same amount of dough in each rope and making the ropes the same length and width.) With your hands, make dough balls into ropes approximately 12 inches long. Take 3 of the ropes and line up parallel to each other. Pinch the tops of the ropes together. Braid the dough from the top down. When you get to the bottom, pinch together the base and tuck under the bread. (If you don't like the look of the top of the braid, at this point you can go back and redo the top). Repeat with last 3 dough balls.

Place braids on a baking sheet, leaving room for them to rise. Cover braids and let rise 45 minutes. Brush with egg white mixed with 1 tablespoon of water. This will create a nice shiny crust. Sprinkle with the pearl sugar.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Bake loaves 40-50 minutes. Cover with foil the last 15 minutes to prevent over-browning. Let loaves cool on a rack. Slice and serve with butter. These loaves also freeze well. I usually make mine a few days in advance and keep in the freezer so I do not have to bother with them on Christmas Eve.

Note:

Cardamom pods can be found in the spice section of well stocked supermarkets or in the bulk spice bins of natural food stores.

Swedish Pearl Sugar can be difficult to find, I most recently purchased it at Sur La Table.