

Marty's Houska

This is a modern version of Mom Barta's traditional Bohemian bread recipe. Martha Barta (Marty) made it frequently to the delight of her family and wisely taught it to her daughter Paula.

Makes 4 – 5 loaves

2	packets	yeast
1/2	cup	warm water
1	teaspoon	sugar
1	cup	golden raisins
2/3	cup	almonds, blanched and slivered zest from one or two lemons
5	large	eggs
1	Tablespoon	salt
1	cup	sugar
1/2	pound	butter, melted and cooled
2 1/2	cups	milk, warmed
8	cups	unbleached flour
1/4	cup	cooking oil

- Put yeast, warm water and a teaspoon of sugar in a large mixing bowl to proof the yeast.
- Put raisins in a mixing cup, just cover them with hot water, and let them soak.
- Add raisins and the water they have soaked in, the zest of lemon, and the almonds to the proofed yeast.
- Add eggs, one at a time. Stir to mix well.
- Add melted butter and warm milk. Stir to mix well.
- Add flour, a little at a time, while stirring and beating to make a fairly stiff dough. Turn dough out onto a board and work in additional flour to make a stiff dough.
- Put cooking oil into the mixing bowl and swish it around to coat the inside surface. Return the dough to the bowl and let it rise. Work it down and let it rise again.
- Divide the dough into loaf-sized portions. I usually get five loaves from this recipe.
- Divide each loaf portion into 1/3 and 2/3 sized pieces. Divide the 2/3-sized piece into thirds, and pull to elongate them to make a braid. Put the braid in the bottom of a loaf pan, which has been coated with Pam. Repeat the braiding with the 1/3-sized piece. Put this braid on top of the other and let them rise.
- If you do not have 5 loaf pans or a double oven, bake three loaves at a time. Set the remaining dough aside, cool the pans, re-spray them and repeat.
- Bake in a 350 °F oven for about 35 minutes – perhaps, more or less. Whenever I am allowing dough to rise, I keep it covered with a wet cotton kitchen towel. When the houska is baked and removed from the oven, I dampen this towel again and lightly dampen the houska top. Then with the end of a stick of cold margarine, I lightly rub the houska top to coat it. This gives it its shine. Now turn the houska out to cool.