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Pain au Chocolat

Makes 24 pastries

These wonderful pastries were the inspiration for us in learning about croissant dough and mastering the methods. There's something about biting into flaky, bread layers and finding a bite of special chocolate in the middle. The process is the same as basic croissant up to the final formation and last rising. We've used the classic shape of a rolled rectangle for the version presented here. Serve them warm with your favorite coffee or tea.

1 Tbsp (1.5 pkg) active dry yeast
6 Tbsp warm water
Two good pinches of sugar
3-1/2 cups flour
1-1/3 cups milk, warmed
1-1/2 Tbsp. sugar
1 Tbsp. salt
4 Tbsp. butter, cut into 8 chunks
1/2 lb. (2 sticks) unsalted butter, chilled
Extra flour for dusting while rolling
1 egg (for egg wash)
12 oz. dark, bittersweet chocolate

PART 1 – MIXING THE DOUGH

1. **ACTIVATE** the yeast. The water should be between 95-100°F, or comfortably warm to the inside of the wrist. Add two good pinches of sugar and stir to dissolve prior to adding the yeast granules. Swirl the sweetened water, and sprinkle the yeast on top while the water is still moving. Allow to sit for 5-7 minutes or until the top is nicely foamy and the yeast awakened.
2. **MEASURE** the flour and place in a large mixing bowl.
3. **WARM** the milk with the sugar, salt, and 4 Tbsp. butter (cut into chunks) added until 95-100°F, or comfortable to the inside of the wrist and the butter melted. (Ensure that the milk is not too hot, but rather, creates a warm environment for optimal yeast performance in the following step.)
4. **COMBINE** both wet mixtures (the foaming yeast and the warmed milk) into the flour, and stir until all of the flour has been incorporated.
5. **TRANSFER** the rough, wet dough onto a working surface (marble pastry slab or countertop).
6. **KNEAD** the dough lightly just until the dough holds together. Do not over-knead. A bench scraper is very useful in scooping up the dough and folding it over on itself.

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7. PLACE the dough in a clean, large mixing bowl for its first rising session. Cover and allow the dough to rise in a warm environment until tripled in size. This may take 3-4 hours depending on the ambient temperatures.

8. DEFLATE the dough and lightly knead the dough in the bowl. Cover and allow the dough to rise a second time until doubled in size, about 1 – 1-1/2 hours. The second rise may be accomplished overnight in the refrigerator.

PART 2 – FOLDING FOR LAYERS

9. PREP a layer of butter by slicing chilled butter into 1/4-inch slices. On a sheet of parchment paper or wax paper, draw a rectangle with a ruler and pencil 7 x 15 inches in size. Turn the paper over placing the drawn side next to the working surface. Arrange the butter slices tightly together within the bounds of the drawn rectangle. Cover with a second layer of parchment paper or wax paper, and with a rolling pin, roll the butter to meld the pieces together and form the desired size.. The butter slab should now be 7 x 15 inches in size. Chill in the refrigerator.

10. TURN the dough onto a working surface and form into a rectangle approximately 8 x 24 inches in size. Use a light dusting on the working surface and on your hands as you push and roll the dough.

11. PLACE the formed butter slab on the right side of the formed dough rectangle. The butter should cover approximately two-thirds of the dough with a half-inch margin of dough surrounding the butter.

First Fold: (forms 3 dough layers and 2 butter layers)

12. FOLD the dough in thirds by first folding the left-hand third (just dough) over on top of half the butter. FOLLOW by folding the right-hand side (butter and dough) over the two dough layers. TURN the dough a quarter turn (90 degrees) clockwise so that the open edge and the longer length of the dough extends left to right.

Second Fold: (forms 7 dough layers and 6 butter layers)

13. ROLL the newly formed rectangle into a larger rectangle, approximately 16 x 20 inches. Lightly dust as necessary during the rolling process. Repeat the folding by thirds process, left side over the middle, right-side on top of the left and middle. TURN the dough a quarter turn (90 degrees) clockwise so that the open and the longer length of the dough extends left to right. CHILL the dough in the freezer for about 15-20 minutes or until well-chilled once more.

Third Fold: (forms 19 dough layers and 18 butter layers)

14. REMOVE the dough from the freezer and allow to acclimate for 5-7 minutes. ROLL the dough again into a rectangle 16 x 20 inches. FOLD as before, left over middle, right over middle. TURN the dough a clockwise quarter turn as before.

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Fourth Fold: (forms 55 dough layers and 54 butter layers)

15. ROLL once again into a rectangle, 16 x 20 inches. FOLD as before, left over middle, right over middle. Wrap the dough well and chill for 1-2 hours or overnight.

PART 3 – FORMING AND BAKING

16. REMOVE the well-chilled dough from the refrigerator and ROLL out into a rectangle, 16 x 20 inches. Cut the rectangle in quarters. Working with one quarter of the dough at a time, roll each quarter into a long rectangle, 7 x 18 inches. (Chill the other pieces while working each dough quarter).

17. CUT the rectangle into 6 strips, each 7 x 3 inches.

18. PLACE about 1/2 ounce of chocolate broken into chunks at the end of each strip of dough.

19. ROLL the strip of dough pinching the sides together encasing the chocolate inside. Place the rolled dough on a baking sheet lined with a baking mat or parchment paper. Leave a generous amount of space between the bundles; they will expand during rising and baking. Repeat with the remaining dough using additional baking sheets.

20. COVER the formed croissants carefully with plastic wrap and allow the bundles to rise until nearly tripled in size, about 1-1/2 – 2 hours.

21. APPLY an egg wash, (1 egg beaten with 1 tablespoon water), gently to the surfaces of the croissants just prior to baking. This will lend a nicely glazed surface to the baked product.

22. BAKE in a preheated 400°F oven for 15 - 17 minutes or until nicely browned. Cool on a baking rack. Serve while still warm.

Inspired by **Tartine Bread** by Chad Robertson , **Mastering the Art of French Cooking** by Julia Child and Simone Beck, and **Fine Cooking**, Issue 97 by Jeffrey Hamelman.