

JANUARY
FESTIVE SWEET BREAD

INGREDIENTS:

Servings: 2 loaves

Water	320 ml
Bay leaf	1
Anise liqueur, such as sambuka	2 tbs
Fennel seeds	1 tbs
Stone-ground cornmeal or polenta	110 g
Sugar	50 g
Unsalted butter	3 tbs
Active dry yeast	2 tbs
or fresh yeast	2 1/3 cakes
Warm water	250 ml
Unbleached all-purpose flour	450 g
Salt	1 1/2 tsp
Sultana raisins	110 g
Black currants	30 g
Figs	200 g
Glaze:	
Egg	1
Turbinado sugar	1 - 2 tbs

TOOLS:

Saucepan
Electric mixer with a paddle attachment and a dough hook
Small bowl
Mixing bowl
Large bowl
Plastic wrap
22.5 x 12.5 cm loaf pans
Parchment, optional
Kitchen towels
Pastry brush

PREPARATION:

Soak the raisins and black currants in cool water for 30 minutes, then drain and squeeze dry. Chop the figs into pieces the size of raisins.

In a saucepan, combine the water, bay leaves, fennel and anise liqueur. Bring to a boil. Add the cornmeal or polenta in a slow stream, while continuously stirring. If using cornmeal, cook slowly for 5-6 minutes while continuously stirring. If using polenta, cook slowly for 8-10 minutes, while continuously stirring. Loosen the mixture as it cooks by gradually adding water. Do not add more than 125 ml. Remove the bay leaves, then add the butter and sugar (reserve one tsp of sugar) and mix until both are completely dissolved. Remove the saucepan from the heat and allow to cool to 40° C.

In a small bowl, combine the yeast, the teaspoon of sugar, and 250 ml of warm water. Stir, then let sit in a warm place until bubbly, approximately 10 minutes. In a large mixing bowl, combine the cooled polenta mixture, flour and salt. Using an electric mixer with a paddle attachment, mix at medium speed for 1-2 minutes. After mixing for 1-2 minutes, switch to a dough hook, and continue mixing at medium speed for 5-6 minutes. The dough will be sticky and soft when done, and will not come away from the sides of the bowl.

Place the dough in a lightly oiled bowl. Cover with plastic wrap and set aside until it has doubled in size.

Place the raisins and chopped figs in a bowl. Add 2-3 tbs of flour and toss. Add the mixture to

the dough. Using a wooden spoon or the dough hook, gently work the fruits into the dough. Oil the loaf pans, or line with parchment. Generously flour a work surface, then place the dough on it. Cut the dough in half, and, using your hands, shape the dough into two rectangular loaves, then add the loaves to the oiled pans. Cover the pans with kitchen towels, and let rise until the loaves have doubled in size. The dough should rise well over the tops of the pans.

Preheat the oven to 205° C. Beat the egg then brush over the tops of the loaves. Sprinkle with turbinado sugar. Bake for 10 minutes then lower the temperature to 180° C and continue baking until a toothpick tester comes out clean, or the bread makes a hollow sound when tapped, approximately 30-40 minutes.