

SAUSAGE BREAD

This recipe makes 2 large loaves about 15-18" long. You will want to make 2 loaves because it is so good, it goes VERY quickly!! Great snack for game day!!

YOU WILL NEED:

Two regular-sized (about 15 1/2" x 10 1/2") cookie sheets, not the commercial or 1/2-pan sheets for this recipe if baking in a standard-sized home oven.

EXTRA WIDE, EXTRA HEAVY DUTY aluminum foil.

Vegetable spray (Pam).

Good quality, plain white (no designs) paper towels.

It is much easier to make this over the course of two days. I prepare the sausage mix (cover and refrigerate it, of course) and dough the night before and then assemble and bake everything the next day.

INGREDIENTS:

2 packets Rapid-Rise dry yeast, standard size (**watch the expiration dates!!**)
2 cups warm water (90-110 degrees - to activate yeast - be careful not too hot or it will kill the yeast and dough won't rise and not too cool or yeast won't activate. About 30-45 seconds in the microwave should be enough. Use a thermometer if you're not sure. You may have to reheat the remaining 1 1/2 cups for a few seconds if it cools too much while you are preparing the mix.)
2 large eggs
1/3 cup sugar
1 tsp salt
1/3 cup (about 5 1/2 Tbsp.) unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly
6 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 green pepper, chopped fine
1 medium onion, chopped fine
2 lbs sausage (makes about 6 cups with the pepper and onion mixed in)
Additional salt and pepper to season sausage when cooking
6 cups mozzarella cheese, shredded

DIRECTIONS:

Heat oven to 350 degrees.

1. Chop onion and green pepper fine, add to sausage and cook on medium heat being careful not to burn, add salt and pepper to taste, if desired.

Put a double layer of paper towels on 2 cookie sheets.

Using a slotted spoon or spatula with slots, scoop up the sausage mixture, allow to drain a little, and transfer to cookie sheets.

Then put a double layer of paper towels on the tops and press down to absorb more grease and moisture.

When done, remove and toss the top layer of towels and CAREFULLY pick up the short ends of the bottom paper towels, raise them up to meet each other, grasp both sides with one hand, raise it up slightly then, slide your other hand underneath and being careful not to spill the sausage, empty the pouch's contents into a bowl. If you don't use good quality paper towels, they will break and your sausage will spill out onto the cookie sheet. There will be some onions and green peppers that stick to the paper towels, but that is okay - toss the towels after making the transfer.

Wash the cookie sheets and set aside for use later.

2. Dissolve yeast in 1/2 cup warm water. Allow to proof - it will foam up if yeast activates.
3. Mix sugar, salt, cooled melted butter and eggs until blended.
4. Add yeast mixture and **STIR**. Add remaining 1 1/2 cup warm water and **STIR** until mixed.
5. Add 6 1/2 cups flour until mixed well - dough will be a little sticky – if so, it's okay to add just a little more flour so you can work with it.
6. Roll dough into a ball and place in large greased bowl or pan and let rise until size doubles - about 1 - 2 hours. OR, make it late at night, rub the dough ball down with olive oil, then cover the bowl well with plastic wrap and allow it rise overnight or until it has doubled in size. Note that you will need a very large bowl for this.
7. In the bowl, punch down the dough lightly.
8. Knead into a uniform ball or roll and cut into 2 equal portions. If it is still sticky, add a little flour and knead it a little more. If the dough is too sticky, it will tear even on a floured surface and fixing it is a real pain. Don't over-knead the dough or it will be tough and difficult to roll out.

Place dough on a lightly floured surface.

9. For each dough ball, do the following:
10. Roll out into large circle about 17-18" in diameter. Be careful not to roll it out too thinly or it will tear when rolling it up with the sausage-cheese mixture.
11. Spread 1 1/2 cups cheese on top of dough, leaving about 1-2" space around the edges.
12. Spread 1/2 of the sausage mix (about 3 cups) on top of cheese and use last 1 1/2 cups of cheese on top of sausage.

13. Okay, here's the hard part: Roll it up like a burrito: Carefully fold the left and right sides over about 2". Then, like rolling up a jelly roll, roll **AWAY** from you while trying to keep the left and right edges folded over. It is a tedious process and requires some creative finger/hand gymnastics, but you will get the hang of it and it does NOT have to be perfect. As you are rolling, you can pinch down the sides a little.

14. Once you make the last roll, overlap (pulling the top end of the dough lip towards you) and overlap it carefully, but tightly and thoroughly, and pinch the last overlap together well along the entire length of the loaf. Don't forget to check the ends and pinch them together tightly.

15. It's a good idea to do this step ahead of time: Using 2 long pieces of foil, make a pouch for the bread loaf, leaving bread enough room to expand while baking, and fold all the edges over well. See **MARK'S TIPS** below on how to make the foil pouch. Note: The roll will just about double in width, and increase about 1/3 in length. If you don't have the Non-Stick foil, you can spray the foil **VERY LIGHTLY** with Pam or other vegetable non-stick spray.

16. Place each loaf on a cookie sheet and put both sheets in the oven (should fit in a standard-sized oven) and bake for 1 hr 10 min to 1 hr 30 minutes at 350 degrees. It usually takes 1:20 in my oven. NOTE: Depending on how big you made your foil pouch, you will probably have to place the pouches on the sheets diagonally and the foil will hit the door and the back of the oven, but that is okay.

17. When time is up, remove loaves and **with gloves on** and **BEING CAREFUL OF THE STEAM**, open pouch to check for doneness. The loaves should be a LIGHT golden brown – if not, re-seal and bake for another 2 - 5 minutes and check again – I usually have to do this.

18. Remove from oven, open, but do not discard, foil pouch and let stand, **UNCOVERED** for approximately 1 hour or until cheese sets up. **Resist the temptation to cut into it or all the cheese will run out.** Then, loosely close the foil pouch and move the loaves to the refrigerator. You do not want them sealed tightly as condensation will form and the bread will become soggy.

19. Once completely cooled, it is okay to slice. To slice, remove loaf from foil, discard foil (see 20. below), and place on cutting board. Slice into 1/2" thick slices, maybe a little thinner. Electric knives work very well for this in case you don't have a regular (serrated) bread knife. Note: Use an old cutting board for this task because the electric knife will gouge your cutting board badly and make it pretty much unusable for most other tasks. I keep an old cutting board just for this task. Be sure to clean it off well before using, though.

20. During the cooling process, some condensation will have formed on the original foil, so, unless serving immediately, after slicing, you will have to wrap it in a new piece of foil (not plastic wrap) and keep it in the refrigerator, but **ONLY** after it has completely cooled and you don't have to seal the foil air tight. Besides, it won't last long enough to spoil anyway - trust me on this.

TIPS:

It is important to bake these on cookie sheets because if you do not, the bottoms of the loaves will over-bake and be tough and hard to cut and eat.

Be careful when buying sausage - many brands contain MSG (monosodium glutamate), a flavor enhancer, and some people are allergic to it. There are name brands out there without the MSG. I believe J.C. Potter is one.

This is best served warm - I microwave for about 30-45 seconds depending upon the number of slices. Also good toasted, but be careful, the cheese will drip out, so be sure to place it on some foil or pan. Do **not** toast in a vertical toaster!!

For some reason, my loaves always split open at the top seam. If yours does this, don't worry – everyone will still love it and it gives it a more rustic look. I don't suggest rolling the loaf over and baking it ON its seam as the cheese will run out the bottom of the loaf.

To make the foil pouches, I do this: Using **Extra Wide, Extra Heavy Duty** foil, tear off two long pieces of equal lengths – about 20" - 24" each. Place one piece on top of the other and tightly fold over the **long** edges several times. Spray very lightly with non-stick spray. Then place the prepared sausage bread in the center of the sheet, **PERPENDICULAR** to the seam. Pull the long ends together over the top of the bread and fold over tightly a few times and fold over and seal the ends tightly.

Use your imagination with this recipe. Instead of the sausage mix, try layering some thin slices of prosciutto ham (get at Sam's) or slices of pepperoni – I wouldn't go overboard on the pepperoni because it can be greasy. For vegetarians, try substituting Morningstar or Boca Crumbles beef or sausage crumbles – you will probably have to spice them up with some select herbs like thyme, oregano or basil. Even though it is cooked, be sure to cook it some more in the skillet to boil out any residual moisture from the freezing process. The regular sausage recipes calls for 2 pounds (32 ounces) of sausage – I believe these vegetarian products come in 12 ounce bags, so you will probably need 3 bags for this recipe. Note that I have not tried this variation.

Be careful if you decide to use some other kind of cheese other than mozzarella – some cheeses, like cheddar, can get oily and don't work well with this recipe. White Monterrey jack works well. Also, if making the vegetarian version, please note that some vegetarians will not eat cheese because it contains a curdling enzyme called rennet (aka chymosin), which is derived from animals - if you want to know more, Google it. There are some cheese brands that do not use it such as Hiland, Sargento, Cabot, Tillamook brands which can be found in most grocery stores and the latter two in larger blocks at Sam's Club. However, not all of their varieties from the respective manufacturers are rennet-free, so be sure to carefully read the label - if it is rennet-free, it should clearly say so or it may say "microbial or non-animal enzymes or "microbial or non-animal rennet." If in doubt, check their websites and or call their customer service numbers - they will know what you are talking about.

Revision: 20201202