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Kouign-Amann

Makes 12 pastries

Pronounced "queen-a-mahn", this Brittany-based breakfast pastry is a delightful cross between a sticky bun and a croissant. Buttery and flaky, with caramelized sugar throughout its layers, this recipe is all about technique — and it's worth the effort!

Dough Ingredients:

1/3 cup warm water
1 teaspoon sugar, plus 2 tablespoons sugar
1 packet (approx. 2-1/4 teaspoons) active dry yeast
3-1/2 cups all purpose flour
1-1/3 cups milk, warmed
1 teaspoon Kosher salt
4 tablespoons butter, melted

Butter Block:

1 cup (2 sticks) high quality salted butter, chilled
1/2 cup sugar
1/4 teaspoon Kosher salt

Muffin Tin Assembly:

2 tablespoons melted butter, separated
1/2 cup sugar
1 teaspoon salt

Directions:

1. Activate the yeast. The water should be between 95-100°F, or comfortably warm to the inside of the wrist. Add 1 teaspoon 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. Combine the warm milk with the remaining two tablespoons sugar, salt, and melted butter. (Ensure that the milk is not too hot, but rather, creates a nice, 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 is 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 and is slightly sticky. Do not over-knead. A bench scraper is very useful in scooping up the dough and folding it over on itself.
7. Place the dough in a clean, large, lightly greased mixing bowl for its first rising session. Cover with plastic wrap and allow the dough to rise in a warm environment until doubled in size. This may take 1-3 hours depending on the ambient temperature.
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.)
9. Prep the butter block. Beat the butter, sugar, and the salt in a stand mixer with the paddle attachment, set to low speed, until combined, roughly 3 minutes. Draw a 7" x 15" rectangle on a piece of parchment. Turn over the paper and scrape the butter mixture onto the parchment sheet. With a rolling pin, roll the butter to be the size of the rectangle. The butter slab should now be 7" x 15" inches in size. Wrap in plastic wrap and chill in the refrigerator for 15 minutes until it is firm, but pliable.
10. Turn the dough onto a working surface and form into a rectangle approximately 8 x 24 inches in size. Use a light flour dusting on the work surface as the dough is rolled out.
11. Place the formed butter slab on top of 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.
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.
13. Roll the newly formed rectangle into a larger rectangle, approximately 16 x 24 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 edge 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.
14. Remove the dough from the freezer and allow to acclimate for 5-7 minutes. Roll the dough again into a rectangle 16 x 24 inches. Fold as before, left over middle, right over middle. Turn the dough a clockwise quarter turn as before.
15. Roll once again into a rectangle, 16 x 24 inches. Fold as before, left over middle, right over middle. Wrap the dough well and chill for 1-2 hours or overnight.
16. Remove the dough from chilling. Roll it out onto a sugar dusted surface into a 16x24 rectangle. Fold horizontally to create a 8 x 24 rectangle of dough. Cut in half, lengthwise to create two 4x24 sections. Cut each section into 6 equally-sized 4x4 squares.
17. Coat the insides of the muffin tin with melted butter. Mix the sugar and salt in a small dish and sprinkle some of the mixture in the muffin tin wells, tapping the sides to coat.
18. Pinch the corners of the 4x4 dough squares into each other and press into the muffin tins until all 12 wells are filled. Drizzle the remaining butter into dough centers and sprinkle with remaining sugar and salt mix. Cover and chill for 1-2 hrs.
19. Preheat the oven to 400°F. Place the muffin tin on the center rack and immediately turn down the heat to 350°F. Bake for 40-45 minutes, rotating the tray halfway through baking. Remove pastries from the oven when they are a deep golden brown and the sugar has caramelized.
20. Immediately transfer the Kouign-amann to a cooling rack (this is important, otherwise they will stick to the insides of the muffin tin!). Cool and enjoy -- ideally the same day.