

OVERNIGHT

Baked French Toast

WITH APPLE COMPOTE

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Bread pudding (bread soaked in custard and cooked in the oven until soft and velvety) is one of my all time favorite comfort desserts. I rarely make it at home, but if it is on the menu when I am out to dinner, I will order it, and if there is chocolate and maybe even ice cream involved, I'll probably order two: one for me and one for any one who wants a bite (I hate sharing).

In light of how much I love bread pudding, I must sheepishly admit that I realized only very recently, that if you call it "baked French toast," you can eat bread pudding for breakfast with your family, kind of on the regular (kids, even this somewhat picky 12 year old I know, love it). But there's more: overnight baked French toast is also incredibly easy to make, feeds a crowd, and because it is best made the night before you want to eat it, is the perfect make-ahead breakfast for Christmas or New Year's morning.

It's super easy to make!

This particular version calls for spreading the bread layers with an easy as pie (pun intended) apple compote before baking – an apple compote is essentially an apple jam, whereby apples are cooked down with a bit of butter and sugar until caramelized. The compote tastes like the filling of an apple crisp, and when combined with the cinnamon-infused custard and soft-enriched bread, brings your French toast game to a whole new autumnal level.

However, if you are not up for slicing, dicing, and cooking down

fruit, the toast is delicious straight up. Finally, I cannot tell you how happy it would make me if you made this treat, but served it after dinner with cinnamon-whipped cream or vanilla ice cream, or both – and, called it – you guessed it – "bread pudding."

Ingredients for the apple compote:

Yield: serves 16

4 apples, I like to use a combination of Granny Smith and Macintosh
4 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 cup granulated sugar
1 teaspoon cinnamon

For the French toast:

1 lb. to 1 1/4 lb. Challah bread (or Brioche)
3 eggs
3 egg yolks
1 tablespoon pure vanilla extract
1 cup granulated sugar
2 teaspoons cinnamon
3 cups of whole milk
1 cup of heavy cream

Turbinado sugar for sprinkling

Instructions to make the compote:

Peel and core the apples and dice them into 1-inch pieces. No need to be fussy with this, as the apples will break down once cooked.

Melt the butter and sugar together over medium-to-medium high heat, until the butter melts and the mixture bubbles. Add the apples and cook for 15 to 20 minutes, until the apples are soft, caramelized, and jammy. Off the heat, add the cinnamon. Set aside to cool slightly, or place in the fridge for up to three days.



To assemble the French toast:

Grease a 13x9x2-inch pan with cooking spray or softened butter and set aside.

Slice the Challah into 1-inch slices and cut those slices in half. Arrange attractively in your prepared pan, layering the bread in three long rows (beginning and ending at the short sides of the pan).

Combine the eggs, yolks, and vanilla in a large mixing bowl and whisk. Add the sugar and cinnamon and whisk again. Add the milk and cream and whisk a final time. Pour the custard over the bread, pressing the bread down with your fingers, if necessary, to make sure all pieces are submerged.

Using your fingers, or a small knife, evenly distribute the compote between the slices of bread, leaving dollops of it poking out over the entire surface. Cover the pan with plastic wrap and place in the refrigerator overnight.

In the morning, preheat the oven to 350-degrees, sprinkle the Turbinado sugar generously over the French toast (this adds a bit of sparkle and a delightful crunch) and bake for 60

minutes, checking after 50. The bread should be golden brown and the custard fully absorbed and "cooked." I like to stick a small paring knife into the center of the toast and when the blade comes out more cake-y, than wet, the French toast is done.

If it's breakfast time, serve immediately with confectioner's sugar lightly dusted on top. And if it's not, then, with vanilla ice cream and/or lightly sweetened whipped cream – and, in this instance, sharing is okay (and probably even required). •

Jessie is a baker and cookbook author, you can learn more about her through her website jessiesheehanbakes.com.