

APPLE KUCHEN

This is a recipe I have always associated with Christmas, since that is pretty much the only time we ever had it growing up. It was wonderfully fresh and warm on Christmas Eve, and the perfect breakfast for an excited kid on Christmas morning. I have continued this tradition with my children, and I hope someday they will learn to make this special treat and share it with their own families. Evidently, my Great Grandmother Thon (Gommie) used to make this every Saturday night, and that was dinner!

This will make 3 bread pans worth, or one 9" by 9" pan and one bread pan. Once you prepare the dough, cover it, place it in a warm place, and allow it to rise until double: 1 to 2 hours depending on how good your yeast is, how moist your dough is, and how warm you kept it. Punch it down, knead it a bit and divide into thirds. On a lightly floured surface, roll out the dough into the approximate shape you want. It's tough because it rolls out oval and you are trying to stick it in a rectangle. If you don't like coaxing it into the pan, try turning the pan upside down on the rolled out dough, and cut with a knife. It helps with the fit, but wastes a bit of the dough.

Once the dough is set in the pans, spray the top of the dough well with Pam spray, or brush with melted butter. This keeps the dough from dehydrating and forming a crust, which will inhibit its ability to rise. Cover with wax paper or moist towel and put it back in its cozy place to rise for about another hour.

DOUGH:

Make ½ of the "Sweet Roll Dough" recipe

TOPPING: (for 3 loaf pans)

6 Granny Smith Apples, peeled, cored, and sliced
1 cup Sugar
2 Tablespoons Butter
1/4 cup Flour
2 teaspoons Cinnamon

Use a whisk to mix all the ingredients except the apples together in a medium sized bowl. It should be mixed enough so the pieces of butter are no larger than a grain of rice. Don't worry if your apples start to turn brown a little bit. Once they get covered with Cinnamon and cooked, they're brown anyway!

Once the dough has doubled in size, it's time to put it all together. Start by preheating the oven to 325 degrees. Begin the topping process by taking 1/3 of the sugar mixture, and spreading it evenly over all the dough. Now take half of the apples and spread them evenly over the tops. Take another 1/3 of the sugar mixture (or half of what's left) and spread evenly over the apples. Use up the rest of the apples on the next layer, and top with the last of the sugar mixture.

Place the Kuchen in the center rack of your oven, and cook for 45 - 50 minutes.

The biggest problem I've had is not cooking it enough to get the center of the 9" by 9" pan done. The layers of apples act as a pretty good insulator. 45 minutes will be plenty for the bread pans. To check the cake pan, you can take a spatula and pry up an end and look at the bread. It should be a deep golden brown, not just lightly brown. Another way to check for doneness is to take a sharp knife, and make a small slice in the middle and peek. If it looks doughy, cook it another 5 - 10 minutes and check again.

When they are done, place a piece of tin foil on the counter, then place cooling racks on the foil. Immediately remove the Kuchen from the pans and allow it to cool. If you allow them to cool in the pans first, the combination of apple juice and sugar makes remarkably strong glue. If you get distracted and this happens, fill the sink about 1 inch deep with very hot water, and hold the bottom of the pan in the water for about 1 minute or until the sugar has melted a bit.

It's best served warm with butter, and reheats quite nicely in the microwave.

Merry Christmas!