

CARAMEL APPLE PULL-APART BREAD

It was fall and we finally had a good crop of apples on our trees, so it was time to find a recipe to use them. I got this idea from Cuisine magazine, and it was OK but I wanted it to be great, so of course I had to fiddle with the recipe, and this is what I came up with! To maximize the apple flavor, the dough is made with apple sauce and apple juice/cider. If you don't want to buy a whole big jar of sauce, buy baby food: it's cheap and works great! As with just about all breads, this is best the day you make it, but it does re-heat in the microwave quite nicely.

INGREDIENTS:

DOUGH:

1 ½ teaspoons Yeast (1 envelope)

¾ Cup Apple Sauce*

¼ Cup Apple Juice/Cider*

¼ Cup Sugar

¼ Cup Shortening (Crisco)

1 Egg

3 ½ Cups Flour

1 teaspoon Salt

* (If you don't have apple sauce or cider, you can use 1 Cup Milk instead)

FILLING:

5 Tablespoons Butter, softened

1 Cup Brown Sugar (dark is best because it has more flavor)

½ Cup White Sugar

1 ½ - 2 teaspoons Cinnamon (If you recently bought your cinnamon, use 1 ½ teaspoons, but if you've had it in the cupboard for awhile, use 2 teaspoons)

5 Medium Apples (around 5-6 Cups), peeled, cored, and sliced. Sweet-tart varieties like Honey Crisp, Pink Lady, and Braeburn are all good choices, but any will do.

2 Tablespoons Butter

1 Cup Toasted Pecans, chopped (optional)

DIRECTIONS:

Begin the dough by combining the apple sauce and cider with the yeast and giving it a stir. Add the rest of the wet ingredients followed by the dry ingredients, adding the salt last. Knead until smooth and silky, cover with plastic wrap, and place in a warm area until double in size, about 1-2 hours.

If you haven't done it yet, take a stick of butter out of the fridge to start bringing it to room temp.

Peel, core, and slice your apples and place them in a large frying pan or Dutch oven with the additional 2 Tablespoons of butter over medium heat. Sauté apples, stirring often for about 10-15 minutes, or until softened. Remove from heat and set aside.

In a medium bowl, combine the sugars and cinnamon and stir together.

On a lightly floured surface, roll out the dough into a rectangle (I know it'll be an oval really, but do your best) that is about 12 X 24 inches. If you are bad at estimating dimensions, use a piece of paper (8 ½ X 11) or grab a 9 X 13 cake pan for reference.

Spread the softened butter evenly over the dough, all the way to the edge, then spread the sugar/cinnamon mixture on top, followed by the apples (and pecans if you must). Using a pizza slicer, cut the dough into pieces about 2 X 4 inches, about the same size as a playing card. This size is *not* critical, and since you rolled out the dough into an oval instead of a rectangle, there will be some odd sized pieces, and that's OK.

Put tinfoil on the bottom of your spring form pan before assembling, then lightly grease the entire pan. Stack 3-5 sections of sliced dough on top of each other and place the dough stacks around the edge of the pan first (with the wide side down), then towards the center once the edges are covered. If you are using a small pan, you may have to push them in to get them to fit. If you are using a larger spring form pan, there may be a gap in the middle when you are done. Fear not, it will fill in as it rises and bakes. Combine the odd sized pieces in the stacks to approximately the same dimensions as the other slices...or feed them to the dogs: they will thank you. Any sugar/apples/pecans left on the counter can be sprinkled on top.

If your spring form pan leaks like mine does (even with the tin foil on the base), *place it on a cookie sheet or your oven will be a disaster!*

Cover and allow to rise for at least 45 minutes or until dough tops have risen at least ½ inch above the top of the pan.

Preheat oven to 350 degrees w the rack in the middle of the oven. Bake for 45-55 minutes or until an instant read thermometer reads at least 190 degrees.

When done, remove from oven and turn upside down on a large plate or platter, then release the spring form pan. Eat it as soon as you are safe from serious burns. Otherwise, allow to cool for at least 45 minutes, then cover, very loosely, with tin foil.