

Karipidou-Collins Basic Tsoureki Vasilopita  
By Claire Aliko Collins

Let's face it. Some of us are not gifted bakers. I include myself in the ranks of those suffering from baker's anxiety. And my family's *vasilopita* is a *tsoureki* - a sweet, yeasted bread that can go wrong in about 1,000 different ways. Thankfully, my family is full of more talented culinary artists who have taken pity on me and put together a straightforward recipe. No obscure ingredients or secret techniques. Even I can't mess this up.

This recipe is not necessarily traditional, but is a collaboration between two generations. It started in Thessaloniki, with a list of simple ingredients. The execution, however, was more difficult to translate across language, time, and systems of measurement. After all, telling me to "add enough flour" or to "wait until the dough is big" is about as useful as trying to teach a dog calculus. So, in Boston, we broke the recipe into different phases of bread making. After several rounds of trial and error, we emerged with a recipe that is a) easy to follow; b) stripped down to the basic steps; and c) exhaustively explained.

Happy Baking and Happy New Year!

Phase	Ingredients	Notes	Key Takeaways
Start Yeast	1 tbsp yeast 1/4 lukewarm/warm water or milk 1/4 tsp sugar	Make sure the bowl isn't cold. For the water or milk, err on the warmer side of lukewarm. This will start the yeast rising better.	Keep ingredients lukewarm/warm.
Everything But Flour	2 eggs (beaten) 1/2 cup sugar 1/3 cup butter (melted) 1/4 tsp vanilla 1 tbsp grated orange zest.	Melt the butter, then add the eggs and whisk. Keep whisking as you add the sugar and the vanilla. Once the mixture isn't hot, just warm, add the mixture to the yeast while gently stirring. Add the orange zest.	Make sure the ingredients aren't too hot, or you will kill the yeast.

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Flour	<p>Approximately 4 cups all-purpose flour</p> <p>Milk (if needed)</p> <p>Coin wrapped in tinfoil</p>	<p>Add the flour in stages, mixing in between with a wooden spoon or dough hook. Keep adding the flour until the dough mixture is soft and tacky. The dough should be pulling away readily from the edges of the bowl and have a good light spring when you stick your finger in it. In general, this will happen once 4 cups of flour have been added, but what is more important is the feel and texture of the dough. Add milk with flour as needed to keep the soft and tacky texture. When you are finished you should be able to gently form a ball of dough.  <b>ADD FOIL WRAPPED COIN!!</b></p>	<p>Tacky: A little sticky and soft, but still light and springy.</p>

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Rise 1 and Rise 2		<p>Rub ball of dough with a little oil. This will keep the skin of the dough from drying out. Put the dough ball in a bowl. Cover and store in a warm place.</p> <p>Rise 1 After about 1 hour, the dough should have risen to about twice (2x) its initial size. Gently punch down the dough with your fists. Punch across the whole surface of the dough. Cover and store in a warm place.</p> <p>Rise 2 After about 1.5 hours, the dough should have risen to about twice - three times its initial size.</p>	Handle the dough gently.
Form		<p>Form the dough into a round shaped loaf. The loaf should be wider than it is tall, but the top should be rounded. Gently tuck the sides of the loaf underneath the bottom. The edges that are being tucked should be touching and pressed and gently massaged into the loaf. Err on the side of under handling than over handling.</p>	When forming the ball, don't over handle the dough. This will push the air out of the dough
Rise 3		Let loaf sit for 30 minutes for a final rise.	

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Toppings	1 egg Dash of milk Slivered almonds for garnish and decoration	Whisk together the egg and the milk to create a wash. Brush on the dough. Make sure to get everywhere. Sprinkle the almonds on the loaf and use them to write out the year.	
Bake		Bake for 40-50 minutes at no higher than 325 F. Once the loaf is brown, cover with foil. When you take the bread out of the oven, tap the underside of the bread. If the bread sounds hollow it is done. If not, bake longer.	The bread bakes at a relatively low temperature.