



French Toast Soufflé

SERVES 4-6

- 10 slices** challah
- 1 cup** whole milk
- 1/2 cup** heavy cream
- 1/2 cup** orange juice
- 8** eggs
- 1/4 cup** sugar
- 1/2 tsp** salt
- 1 tsp** vanilla
- 2 Tbs** cinnamon sugar (1/2 cinnamon/1/2 sugar)
- 1/2 cup** maple syrup

Preheat oven to 325°. Combine eggs, milk, cream, orange juice, sugar, salt, and vanilla in a 4-quart bowl. Vigorously stir to froth using a wire whisk. Cut challah into nine 1-inch slices, and cut the slices vertically in half. Add bread to custard mixture, and allow to soak for 5 minutes, pushing the bread down into the liquid to coat. The bread will absorb a lot of the custard (but not all of it), so treat it gently.

Liberalily coat a 12×9 casserole with cooking spray, and gently pour contents of bowl into it, spreading bread slices evenly in dish, not more than 2 layers deep. Sprinkle cinnamon sugar on top of contents. Place in oven and cook for 30-40 minutes, or until the bread is puffed up and browned on top.

Remove casserole from oven and pour warm maple syrup over mixture. Serve immediately.

FRENCH TOAST IS THE PERFECT COMBINATION of salty-sweet and chewy-tender. The best way to make french toast is to quickly sauté the custard-saturated bread in lots of butter, and then put the entire pan of toast in the oven to cook the interiors until they puff up. Unfortunately, it only takes a few minutes for the slices of toast to deflate. And there is always lots of leftover custard mixture that is a shame to toss.

This casserole solves both problems and makes the tender centers of the bread the star while still providing some serious chew. This dish is a combination of French toast, bread pudding and a soufflé.

FINDING A GREAT CHALLAH isn't easy. Challah is a rich egg bread, but not as dense as a brioche. Traditionally, challahs—which are used as part of the Jewish Sabbath ritual—are braided into an oblong football-shaped loaf. This creates lots of crust that adds a delicious texture to the final dish. How do you tell if you've found a good challah?

Thwack on one like a melon and it should produce a satisfying thumping noise. The crust should be smooth and hard, but not crumbly, and the interior tooth should be moist and light.

TRY ADDING SOME EXTRAS. While the French Toast Soufflé is tasty just plain, a little creativity can make this dish your very own masterpiece—think “danish” and you'll understand what extra ingredients will delight. Fold the extras into the custard *after* adding the bread to help distribute them evenly. Adding pecans, raisins, or chocolate chips gives the final product an even brunchier vibe. Add half a brick of Philadelphia cream cheese, cut into small cubes, to provide a rich, creamy surprise to the casserole. Substitute dark rum for the vanilla, or change out the orange juice for mashed mandarin oranges in syrup.

This recipe multiplies easily so you can feed a crowd. Plus, it reheats in the microwave really well, so the leftovers are nearly as tasty the next day.