

Pan de Muerto



Time

Prep Time: 20 minutes

Cook Time: 15 minutes

Resting Time: about 1 hour each time

Total Time: 2 hours 35 minutes

Servings: 16 small rolls or 2 large breads

Calories: 228 kcal

Author: Mely Martínez
Mexicoinmykitchen.com

Pan de Muerto (“Bread of the Dead”) is a traditional Mexican sweet bread that is commonly made during Day of the Dead (Día de Muertos). It is very important during this season, and the meaning behind it is as rich as its flavor.

During the Day of the Dead holiday (Oct. 31 – Nov. 2), Mexicans honor their loved ones who have passed away, and leave them offerings (“ofrendas”) at their gravesites or at altars made at home. Although this tradition is originally rooted in the central and southern parts of the country, families now celebrate the holiday all throughout Mexico, and in other countries. The bread represents an offering made to the departed loved one. While the family members are the ones who eat the Pan de Muerto physically, it is believed that when the spirit returns during the Day of the Dead, it can be nourished by the “essence” of the bread (and any other offerings that have been left for it).

There are countless differing stories and explanations, but most will tell you that the pieces forming a cross are meant to symbolize the bones of the dead. On top of the bun is a small ball or nub, which some say is a teardrop, representing the tears shed for the dead. Others say it represents a skull, while still others say it represents the heart.

Ingredients

- 4 cups all purpose flour
- 2 Tablespoons active-dry yeast
- ½ cup sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 80 grams butter at room temperature + 30 grs to brush the bread after baking
- 80 grams unsalted margarine room temperature plus more for bowl and pans
- 4 large eggs room temperature
- Orange zest from 2 oranges
- 60 ml. warm water about 110 degrees
- 1 teaspoon orange blossom water or orange essence
- 1 large egg lightly beaten to brush the bread
- Sugar to decorate the bread at the end



Instructions

1. Place the 4 eggs, margarine, salt and half of the sugar in the mixer bowl. Using the hook attachment start working the dough for about 2 minutes. Add the all-purpose flour in small amounts alternating with the water. Add the dry active yeast and mix until well combined.
2. Continue by adding one at a time the butter, orange zest, the rest of the sugar and the orange blossom essence, mixing well after each addition until soft dough forms.
3. Remove the dough from the mixing bowl and place it onto a work surface; knead until smooth, dusting work surface lightly with flour, as needed, if the dough begins to stick. Knead for a couple more minutes. Coat the interior of a large bowl with margarine; transfer dough to bowl and cover with plastic wrap. Let stand in a warm place until it doubles in size, about 45 minutes to 1 hour.
4. Transfer the dough from the bowl onto working surface, separate 300 grams of the dough to form the decorative bones later on. Cut the rest of the dough in 70 grs. pieces or in two equal pieces if making 2 large breads. (Making sure to separate 300 grams of dough to form the decorative bones.). Prepare 2 greased baking sheets, set aside.





Shaping the Pan de Muerto bread

1. Take one portion of the dough and place it in the palm of your hand. Put your fingers in and add a bit of pressure and shape each piece into a tight ball rolling the dough on the surface. This is called “bolear” in Spanish (if, at first they do not look fine to you, do not worry you will achieve this with practice). Place on prepared baking sheets 2 inches apart. Press the dough slightly.
2. Place the remaining 300 grs of dough we reserved onto the work surface, dusting with flour if needed, and knead until the flour is integrated perfectly (this is for the bones to decorate our breads).
3. Take small portions of dough and roll in small logs putting a little pressure with the fingers to form the bones. Once your bones are already formed (you need 2 for each bread), brush each roll forming a cross on top of each bun with a mix made out of the remaining beaten egg with 1 Tablespoon of water. Once you marked the cross with the brush, you place the bones as it shows in the above picture, cutting any extra dough.
4. With the leftover dough form small balls, varnish the center of the buns where the bones come together and put the ball there as shown in the picture. Cover baking sheets with plastic wrap and let rise in a warm place until buns are touching and doubled in size, 1 ½ to 2 hours.
5. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
6. Add a pinch of salt to our mix of egg and water and brush the buns before placing in the oven. Transfer buns to oven and bake until golden brown, 15 to 17 minutes, approximately, if making the small buns. If you are making the larger version the baking time will change a little. Remember that every oven is different. (When the bottom of the bread is golden it indicates that they are ready). Transfer to a wire rack and cool to room temperature.
7. Once your Pan de Muerto bread has a completely cooled brush with the remaining butter and then dust with sugar.

Notes

Instructions are given to work the dough in the electric mixer, but it can be done by hand.



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