PULLA YEAST COFFEE BREAD

**Pulla (Pitka)**

Do not expect pulla to be light and fluffy; it is a moist rich coffee bread. It is served without butter and is a delight when it is hot. The Finnish housewife usually bakes on Saturday so there will be fresh pulla for Sunday morning coffee.

A straight braid is the standard form for pulla, but the braided pulla dough is often shaped into a wreath for special occasions such as name days, birthdays, anniversaries, or other honor celebrations. (In Finland, one's "name day" or saint's day—the day that bears the name of the saint after whom one is named—is celebrated by adults instead of the birthday. Children, however, do celebrate birthdays.)

Note: Observe carefully the order of combining the ingredients. The melted butter is added after about half of the flour.

1 package active dry yeast
1/2 cup warm water
2 cups milk, scalded and cooled to lukewarm
1 cup (or less) sugar
1 teaspoon salt

Glaze
1 egg, beaten
1/2 cup chopped or sliced almonds (optional)

1/2 cup crushed lump sugar (optional)

1-7 whole cardamom pods, seeded and crushed (about 1 teaspoon)
4 eggs, beaten
8-9 cups sifted white flour
1/2 cup melted butter

Dissolve the yeast in the warm water. Stir in the milk, sugar, salt, cardamom, eggs, and enough flour to make a batter (about 2 cups). Beat until the dough is smooth and elastic. Add about 3 cups of the flour and beat well; the dough should be quite smooth and glossy in appearance. Add the melted butter and stir in well. Beat again until the dough looks glossy. Stir in the remaining flour until a stiff dough forms.

Turn out onto a lightly floured board and cover with an inverted mixing bowl. Let the dough rest 15 minutes. Knead until smooth and satiny. Place in a lightly greased mixing bowl, turn the dough to grease the top, cover lightly, and let rise in a warm place (about 85°F) until doubled in bulk (about 1 hour). Punch down and let rise again until almost doubled (about 30 minutes).

Turn out again onto a slightly floured board, divide into 3 parts, then divide each of these parts into 3. Shape each into a strip about 16 inches long by rolling the dough between the palms and the board. Braid the 3 strips together into a straight loaf, pinch the ends together, and tuck under. Repeat for the second and third loaves. Lift the braids onto lightly greased baking sheets. Let rise for about 20 minutes (the braids should be puffy but not doubled in size).

Glaze the loaves by brushing with the beaten egg, and if you wish, sprinkle with the crushed sugar and the almonds.

Bake in a hot oven (400°F) 25 to 30 minutes. Do not overbake or the loaves will be too dry. Remove from the oven when a light golden-brown. Makes 3 braids. Slice to serve.

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**BISHOP'S WIG**

Prepare Pulla Yeast Coffee Bread dough (see index), divide into 3 portions (each will make 1 Bishop's Wig), and divide each portion into 3 parts. Roll each of these parts into a strand about 18 inches long. Fold the first strand in half and place on a lightly greased baking sheet, curling each end upward. Place the second strand next to the first strand so that the curled ends are just above those of the first. Repeat with the third strand (see illustration). Let rise for 30 minutes, brush with beaten egg, and bake in a hot oven (400°F) for 20 to 25 minutes or until golden. If you wish, you may decorate the "curls" with halved cherries or raisins before baking. Makes 3 "wigs."