

Babka

From [*Baba's Kitchen: Ukrainian Soul Food, Third Edition*](#)

By Raisa Stone

Babka get its name from Ukraina's matriarchal culture. Woman is revered throughout our thousands of years of history, and this bread's shape is like woman. And of course, older woman is most powerful of all. Ukraina is most prolific country in world for archaeological findings of goddess figurines, dating back 20,000 years.

Most stunning example is кам'яна бабу: *kamyany babas*. These are huge babas made from stone, 3 to 6 feet tall. They survive from 700 to 400 BC, constructed by our Scythian and Sarmatian ancestors right across country. You can find them mostly as grave marker. Imagine comfort in knowing baba is watching over you! You can see photos of these stone babas on my website's Easter page.

In making Babka, we are reaching back to our ancestors, honouring. Of course we do this at *Svyata Vecherya*, Christmas Eve as well, in different way. Then we symbolize ancestor with use of grandfather wheat sheaf, *didukh*.

In Ukraina, women compete to make most glamorous Babka, using as many as 120 egg yolks to display how good are their hens and how generous hospodynia, hostess, she is. This is much healthier contest than crazy people on TV running around naked on desert island or something.

Baba Tip: for many years, you been scrounging coffee cans that you hope aren't rusted, to bake your Babka. Relax, dorahenka. Send your geezer to thrift store to find you ceramic insert from slow cooker. Once you line this with parchment paper and butter, no way will Babka stick, and will have even baking and perfect matriarch shape!

You ready? Baba hope you get your free range organic egg from farmer, because this make best Babka. Will also contribute to beautiful yellow color. This recipe will make **enough dough for 4, 2 lb. coffee cans or 2-3**

ceramic crock liners, depending on size. Don't be worry. Excess dough can be put in smaller pans. As long as you get at least one Babka, you can hold head up.

Ingredient List:

Sponge (is what yeasty base is called. No cleaning tool involved)

- Yeast, 3 packages or 3 tbsp. Do not use fast rising! Go slow and careful. Squint for "best before" date, or you be sorry.
- White sugar, 1 tbsp.
- Whole milk, 2 cups scalded and cooled
- Flour, 2 tbsp.

Dough

- Icing sugar, two cups
- Egg yolks, one dozen large
- Quality pastry flour, 8 cups
- Vanilla or rum extract, 1 tsp.
- Grated lemon or orange rind, 1 tbsp.
- Unsalted butter, 1 cup
- Salt, 1 tsp.

Egg Wash

- Egg, one large
- Milk or water, 2 tbsp.

Icing (goes on top of egg wash after baking and cooling)

- Icing sugar, 1 cup
- Salt, tiny pinch
- Whole milk, two tbsp. OR mix milk and rum or apple/orange juice

Lemon or Orange Icing

- Icing Sugar, 1/2 cup
- Fresh lemon or orange juice, 1/2 tsp

Rum Icing

- Dark rum, two tbsp.
- Boiled water, cooled, 1/4 cup
- Granulated sugar, 1/2 cup

Optional

- **Organic raisins**, 1 cup
- Substitute 1/4 cup blanched, chopped **almonds** for 1/2 cup raisins
- **Pure saffron threads, 1/2 oz. OR turmeric, 3/4 tsp.** for yellow color. Crumble saffron in just enough warm water to cover for 20 minutes, then pour liquid and threads in with first kneading of dough.
- Mix raisins with other **dried fruit**, such as diced apricots, craisins or candied orange peel. Not dates, they will get mushinski! Not candied cherries! For some reason, there is prejudice against these in cake. Also, coloring can smear and make your Babka look like she wear cheap lipstick. Personal, Baba enjoy cherry in her horilka.
- Add as much as 1 tbsp. **vanilla** in dough for distinct taste.
- Substitute 1 cup scalded **sweet cream** for 1 cup milk. Do this if you want more tender Babka, and are confident in your ability to scald. Cream have more sensitive feeling than milk, and will hold her breath and burn more easily.
- Add 1/4 tsp. ground **ginger** to sponge mixture.

Here is our sacred Babka adventure, Poopchik:

As with Paska, cultivate attitude of meditation, and kick noisy people out from house. Babka also appreciate some good singing. I do this myself and also put on Ukrainian record.

Baba Tip: to prevent raisins burning, soak them in boiling water 30 minutes, then drain. You can add dark rum or vanilla to this water, too.

Leave butter out at least couple hours to soften.

Scald your milk or milk/cream mix in heavy bottom pot. This mean you put on medium high, and keep stirring until very light bubble form. Then take off element immediately and let cool to room temp. See instructions in Paska recipe, above.

Baba Warning: DO NOT BOIL. DO NOT LEAVE ON ELEMENT, then call Baba crying that it taste scorched. If it does boil, throw away or you

going to ruin your Babka.

For superior result, **sift** your flour and icing sugar. Really.

Mix yeast, sugar and flour into room temp milk until dissolved. Cover with clean cloth and put in warm corner. Let it sit at least 30 minutes until it rises and becomes bubbly. This is why we call “sponge.” Could even take as long as hour, depending on temperature and mood of yeast. Don’t worry. If yeast was fresh, it will rise.

Beat beat beat those dozen egg yolks. Baba hope you find good use for whites. You can give them to diet-schmiet friend, or freeze. By way, one egg white fills two spaces in ice cube tray. This is handy way to freeze.

Once yolks are evenly thick, **beat in sugar.** By now, you will be grateful Baba advise icing sugar. So much easier to blend.

Baba Warning: Do not use electric mixer unless you have arthritis or something. Sacred task requires hand work. Babka and Paska have strange tendency to fail when you take shortcuts.

Add yeasty sponge to egg and sugar, beat some more.

Stir in flour little bit at time till blended. As you do this, stir in **salt, vanilla (or rum) and fruit zest.** If you are using **saffron or turmeric** for sunny color, now is time.

Knead in small bits of soft butter.

Knead dough until it is no longer sticky. **Knead in raisins** just before this.

Put dough aside for rising double, in warm corner, covered.

Punch down dough.

Knead some more, then allow to **rise second time.**

In meantime, **grease inside of your pans with butter, and place parchment around perimeter.** Grease seam. You will love how easy this make getting Baba out later.

Turn oven to 400 F. If you are using wood stove, you going to have to figure out. Tradition is that we burn willow branches in fire before baking Babka to honor her. You can always place some in fire place.

Baba Tip: wait until oven light goes out before putting Babka in oven. This ensures more even baking. Also, put oven rack low, so your Babka don’t

smack her head on top of oven. This is not good, Poopchik.

Fill pans 1/3, cover with plastic. Let rise until dough is peeking out top of pan.

Bake 10 minutes, then lower to 325 F for 30 minutes. For last 20 minutes, lower to 275 F. Watch through oven door with light on, often.

If at any time top of Babka is browning too fast, put tinfoil hat on her head. You probably know someone from whom to borrow. This lowering heat allow fast final rising and good crust. You lower heat so Babka then bake evenly inside. This is good trick for your Medivnyk, too.

Once you take her from oven, **let sit 15 minutes to settle and breathe.** When she slide out so easy, you be happy you use parchment. Just like with Paska, **have soft cloth and pillow waiting** for her. These ancient ladies do not like hard surface. They prefer to recline in comfort. Do not get careless at this point. Babka reserve right to fall apart at this point! You also going to have to move her position around few times, on pillow. Do not cuddle.

Wait to ice Babka until she is cool. **Mix ingredients from any of icings** at top this recipe and pour. Or use clean paintbrush. I think custom of icing Babka come from honoring her gray hair!

You can make beautiful display by draping *rushnyk*, embroidered cloth, around Babka's base. Act like you are dressing your ancestor. Also, we often put *krashanky* around her feet, and even take to cemetery to honor our dead, may their memory be eternal.

As *krashanky* are made with vegetable dyes, they can be eaten. Again, stone babas were usually grave markers, and we connect with this tradition. Read more about this ancestor tradition on my Easter web page.

Babka is always sliced in rounds, from bottom. Cut off bottom crust, DO NOT EAT. **Replace crust** every time you slice bread, to keep her from drying out. **Krystos Voskres! Veselykh Svyat!**

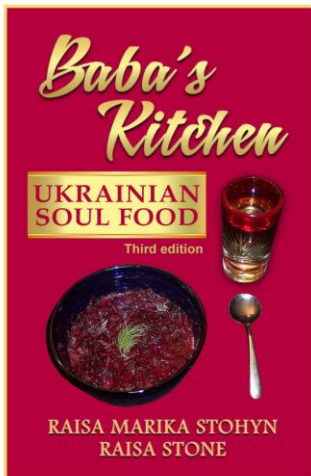
Baba Raisa

If you enjoyed this recipe, you will LOVE my books! *Baba's Kitchen: Ukrainian Soul Food* is outrageous stories and 200 traditional recipes and folk medicines from Stalinist survivors. *Rosie's*

Rescue is a Ukrainian cultural book for animal loving children, 8+ years.

For more information and **Baba's free newsletter** (recipes in addition to those in the book), visit: WWW.UKRAINIANSOULFOOD.CA

Click here to visit [Baba's Department Store](#) for Paska tins, Easter cards, pysanka coins, candles, hand beaded jewelry, nail wraps, decorative plates and tiles. Over 2000 quality Ukrainian items!



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