

Japanese Milk Bread

6-6³/₄ cups bread flour

³/₄ cup water

2 tablespoons, plus ¹/₄ teaspoon yeast

1¹/₃ cups milk

2 tablespoons heavy cream

4 tablespoons sugar

2 tablespoons powdered milk

4 large eggs, room temperature

1 tablespoon salt

¹/₂ cup softened unsalted butter

For the Starter

Put ³/₄ cup of 110° water in a medium-sized bowl. With a spoon, stir in ³/₄ cup of bread flour and ¹/₄ teaspoon of yeast. Mix thoroughly, and cover with plastic wrap. Let the mixture sit overnight at room temperature. If the room is very warm (over 75°), keep it in the refrigerator overnight, but remove it at least one hour before beginning to make the bread.

For the Bread

Heat 1¹/₃ cups of milk, plus 2 tablespoons of heavy cream to 110°, and pour into the bowl of a stand mixer. Stir in 2 tablespoons of yeast and 1 tablespoon of sugar. Let proof for 10-15 minutes, until bubbles begin to form. Whisk in 3 more tablespoons of sugar, 2 tablespoons of powdered milk, and 4 beaten eggs.

Whisk in the starter mixture a small piece at a time. Place the bowl onto the mixer stand and attach a dough hook.

With the mixer on low speed, add 1 cup of flour. When it is incorporated, add 1 tablespoon of salt.

With the mixer still running, add 1 cup of flour at a time, waiting until it is mostly incorporated before adding the next cup. As the mixture starts to come together, stop adding flour. Increase the speed to medium, and continue to mix for 5-8 minutes.

With the mixer still running, add ¹/₂ cup of softened butter a few small pieces at a time. Continue running the mixer until the dough leaves the sides of the bowl. If it still seems very sticky, sprinkle on just enough extra flour until it comes away from the bowl.

Remove the dough to a lightly floured surface, and knead for a few minutes until it becomes satiny.

Butter a large bowl, and place the dough in it, rolling it around so that it is coated in butter. Cover with plastic wrap, and let rise in a warm place for about an hour, or until doubled in bulk.

Remove the dough onto a lightly floured surface, and cut into 3 equal pieces with a sharp knife. Let rest 5 minutes. With a floured rolling pin, roll out each piece 18-inches long and as wide as the length of your baking pans. Cover and let rest about 20 minutes.

Butter 3 baking pans. Roll each strip into cylinders. Pinch the seams together with your fingers, and place in the baking pans seam-side down. Loosely cover and let rise 45 minutes to an hour.

Preheat the oven to 350°. To give a more golden crust, brush the top of each loaf with a little cream or melted butter. Bake for about 30 minutes, brushing again with the cream or butter about half way through the baking. The loaves are done when they are golden and have a hollow sound when tapped.

Remove to a wire rack, and let cool. Extra loaves will freeze nicely if wrapped in aluminum foil, then enclosed in a plastic bag.