

Happy Mother's Day - BAKED FRENCH TOAST

For the French Toast:

1 14- to 16-inch long soft Italian loaf
3 large eggs
2 cups milk or half & half
4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
4 tablespoons sugar
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pure almond extract

Optional: Instead of almond extract, use lemon, coconut, orange or vanilla extract. **NOTE:** My other FAV thing too, is to add a splash of a favorite liquor...Gran Marnier, Frangelico, Kaluha or **MY current FAV** is to add a splash of a South African Liquor called **AMARULA Creme** ... it is super Yummy!! **FYI:** The Amarula fruit, is the beloved intoxicant of elephants!!! (See link) <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K035ru09y8s>

FOR TOPPING:

1 large egg white
3 tablespoons sugar
3/4 cup sliced almonds or chopped walnuts or pecans

Accompaniment: your choice of fresh strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, sliced bananas, whipped cream, vanilla ice cream

To make French toast: Cut loaf crosswise into 1-inch thick slices and gently squeeze as many as possible, a cut side up, into a buttered 13- by 9-inch pan. (I like white corning casseroles and glass baking dishes). Whisk together eggs, milk, butter, sugar, salt, and extract and pour evenly over bread. Chill, covered, until bread has absorbed custard, about 1 hour or overnight.

Assemble topping: Preheat oven to 375 F. with rack in middle.

Lightly whisk egg white with sugar and a generous pinch of salt and stir in almonds until well combined. Spread mixture over bread and bake until bread is puffed and golden, 25 to 35 minutes. Serve warm.

Notes and Tips:

Custards combine well if you begin by whisking the eggs first, then add the milk.

When you add the butter, do it in a slow stream, whisking all the while.

Use a long serrated knife to cut the bread...and if you want a fancier presentation then slice on the diagonal.

Use a rubber spatula to spread the almond mixture over the bread.

This French toast is delicious on it's own or just with maple syrup but it's particularly nice with any of the accompaniments listed above...or please experiment!!!

Game Plan: 1 1/2 hours Ahead and Up to 1 Day Ahead: Butter pan, then slice bread and fit it into pan. Make custard and pour over bread, then chill, covered.

45 Minutes Ahead: Assemble almond topping while oven is preheating.

About this recipe:

Almond croissants inspired me and this baked version of French Toast, which is assembled ahead and then slid into the oven, is the way to go when you are serving a brunch. **Note:** sometimes on charter to save time or in rough seas underway, the classic top-of-the-stove method for French Toast is too labor-intensive... Anyway, I love the way the almond topping crisps up to offset the custardy innards of the bread...and the fact, that I can assemble it the night before!!!

Have FUN...and ENJOY!!!