

SALT STICKS

There is a Hungarian recipe that I learned in Darien, Connecticut, more than 30 years ago, when I worked at a catering company together with a Hungarian lady, Mrs. Elizabeth Barna.

She was beautiful, almost 6-feet tall, white-haired, about the age of my mother. She was the widow of the police chief in a small Hungarian town, and she came to the U.S. after the Second World War with two young children.

She was a talented cook and a very hard worker. One of her great recipes was the Hungarian salt stick. As she told me, because of her husband's position in that beautiful town in northeastern Hungary, their house was visited by official guests and social friends year round.

This recipe was one of her main staples in entertaining, because of its versatility.

She told me she served the sticks with scrambled eggs for breakfast; with soup and a salad for a light lunch; as an appetizer at dinner; with cheese for dessert.

It is hard to specify an exact baking time or temperature for this simple recipe. Depending on how you handle the dough, and how accurate your oven temperature controls are, your own experience will tell you how hot your oven should be and how long you should bake the salt sticks. Or for that matter, how long you should mix the dough before rolling it out. But once you master this dough, you will be very proud of it.

SALT STICKS

approximately 60 sticks

1 cup (2 sticks) salted butter
3 egg yolks
6 cups flour
1/2 package dry yeast
5 tablespoons warm milk

dash of sugar
dash of salt
1/3 cup warm water
1 egg
3 teaspoons caraway seeds
1/2 cup coarse salt (Kosher)

1. Mix the butter and egg yolks in an electric mixer equipped with a paddle or dough hook.

2. Slowly incorporate all but a few tablespoons of the flour.

3. Dissolve the yeast in the warm milk.

4. Add the yeast mixture to the flour mixture along with the sugar, salt, and water.

5. Keep mixing until the dough no longer sticks to the sides of the bowl. The dough will be somewhat crumbly, not very moist.

6. Roll the dough out on a floured board to approximately 1/4 inch thick.

7. With a pastry wheel, cut pieces 1/3 by 3 inches.

8. By hand, shape both ends of each piece of

dough to form a point. Place the pieces on a lightly greased baking sheet. Cover with a towel and let them rest in a warm place 15 to 20 minutes.

9. Preheat the oven to 350 or 375°F.

10. Beat the egg; then run it through a sieve.

11. Brush the top of each salt stick with egg and sprinkle generously with coarse salt and caraway seeds.

12. Bake the salt sticks for approximately 12 minutes or until the points are browned.

If you cannot get other than regular table salt, mix it with a few drops of water so that it thickens like a syrup. Drizzle this mixture over the salt sticks after they have been baking for 2-3 minutes. They will develop little salt "blisters" resembling small pieces of popcorn, as sometimes seen on professional bakers' salt sticks.