



Vanessa's Pandoro, a Cake for Christmas

Instructions

Pandoro is the most glorious Christmas speciality from the Italian city of Verona. This rich, sweet, fragrant bread is fairy light, golden in colour and sweetly scented with orange essence. Traditionally, pandoro is baked in a star-shaped tin and generously dusted with icing sugar, as a sweet edible reference to the snow-topped Italian Alps. The name literally translates as 'golden bread' (pan d'oro), and its 18th century origins were as a delicacy for the Venetian aristocracy; with its refined flour and enriched dough, the common people could only dream of what it tasted like. I've chosen to bake two pandoros at the same time, to make efficient use of both the time and effort put into mixing, and the heat of your oven. They store well, and make impressive yet relatively inexpensive gifts with very little packaging – that is, if you can bear to give one away.

Don't be put off making this recipe by its length, or the fact that there are several separate stages; I promise that it is not complicated to make and I have included advice and guidance so you understand what is going on at each stage.

It's worth noting that the best rise is as a result of gentle warmth, so an ambient temperature of around 20-22°C is essential. The final colour of your bread will be affected by the colour of the egg yolks, and dark yellow free range yolks will give a much deeper colour than those insipid intensively-produced eggs. If like me you want the most delicious bread possible then my top tip is to use the best Fairtrade or ethically-sourced vanilla powder, such as Ndali. The exceptional quantity of vanillin crystals in the powder accentuates the sweet tones of the orange blossom, far more so than any one-dimensional flat over-processed version. At special times of the year, there's a pleasure in following the ancient tradition of using the very best ingredients, and trust me when I say that it really does make a difference to the end result.

To get a light, delicate texture, it is essential to use right kind of flour. With its very high protein level, Mulino Marino Manitoba is ideal. All of the ingredients (except basic larder ingredients) and two Pandoro tins are available in our discounted Pandoro kit.



Serves: 8 per Pandoro; makes 2

Prep time: 24 hours; overnight, plus 1½ hours work over the course of 8 – 9 hours.

Cooking time: 45-50 minutes

Equipment: Stand mixer, kitchen thermometer, 2 x 750g Pandoro tins, 1 bowl plus 2 mixing bowls



In Italy, strong bread-making flour is sometimes called “Manitoba”, regardless of whether or not it’s from that province of Canada, and the word comes from an indigenous peoples’ name for Manitou, the Great Spirit. Strong flour has the special characteristic of forming more gluten during mixing and proving, and because of its unique strength, it is often blended with lower-gluten flour flours for making good, but plainer, doughs.

Mulino Marino Manitoba type 0 is a 100%-pure Manitoba flour, not blended with softer wheats, and this makes it perfect for making traditional enriched doughs where the butter and other inclusions would otherwise inhibit the natural rising of the dough.

You will also need a little sourdough starter (leaven); if you don’t have a starter of your own, see if a sourdough-baking friend can give you some.

Method

Step 1 (Starter):

- 1 20ml tbsp sourdough starter
- 100ml water
- 70g Mulino Marino Manitoba Flour

The evening before you want to bake, put 1 generous tablespoon of your sourdough starter in a bowl large enough to allow for rising overnight, and add 100ml of tepid water (31-33°C). Mix this to a milky liquid then add the 70g of flour. Mix again, then cover with a clean, slightly damp cloth, and leave overnight.

Step 2 (Sponge):

- 80g tepid water (31-33°C)
- 8g Saf-Gold instant osmotolerant yeast
- 1 medium free range egg,
- 20g Fairtrade caster sugar
- 60g Mulino Marino Manitoba flour

It is best that you start making your Pandoro early in the day – this gives you enough time to complete the bake in a day and means that your sourdough starter will still be lively.



Pour the water into a large mixing bowl, add the yeast and whisk together. Cover, and leave for 10 minutes somewhere warm and draught free. Add the egg and sugar and whisk again, then stir in the flour and beat for about 1 minute. Cover the bowl with cling film and set to one side until doubled in volume, which takes about an hour and fifteen minutes. In the meantime start making the first dough.

Step 3 (First Dough):

- 25g tepid water (31-33°C)
- 3g Saf-Gold instant osmotolerant yeast
- 1 medium free range egg, plus
- 1 extra egg yolk
- 40g Fairtrade caster sugar
- 40g unsalted butter, softened
- 200g Mulino Marino Manitoba flour

Pour the water into a second large mixing bowl and whisk in the yeast. Leave for 10 minutes, then add the eggs, sugar and butter, and whisk. Stir in the flour with a wooden spoon and mix well. Cover the bowl with cling film and set to one side for an hour. Note: this is a stiff dough.

Step 4 (Second Dough):

- 4 medium free range eggs
- 200g Fairtrade caster sugar
- 1 tsp fine sea salt
- 1 tsp Ndali Fairtrade vanilla powder
- 2 tbsp Arancio extra Calabria orange essence
(or orange extract)
- 200g unsalted butter, melted (still slightly warm from melting)
- 330g Mulino Marino Manitoba flour

plus:

- unsalted butter for the tins
- icing sugar, finely sifted, to serve

Place the eggs, sugar, salt, vanilla powder and orange essence into the large mixing bowl of a stand mixer, and mix them together on a low setting for about 3 minutes until the ingredients are blended using the standard cake paddle (the quantity of orange essence may seem



excessive, but much of the aroma is lost during cooking).

Add the Starter from Step 1 which has risen overnight, and mix gently. Once this is combined, add the Sponge from Step 2 and the First Dough from Step 3, and continue mixing. Add the melted butter and once incorporated, add the 330g flour and mix gently until everything is combined. The dough will be soft. Leave to rest for 10 minutes to ensure that the flour has had time to fully and evenly absorb the liquid, which will help avoid any unevenness in the final texture.

Once the dough has rested, change the cake paddle to a dough hook and start the mixer, gradually bringing the speed up from low to its highest setting. For the next 35 – 40 minutes, keep the machine on a high setting to vigorously mix the dough. Do not be tempted to stop early. Watch the dough: as it is processed, you will see that it comes together and will pull away from the side of the mixing bowl. As this happens, the sound will change, becoming more rhythmic as the dough knocks from side to side. The end result should be silky and stretchy.

Step 5 (Prove):

Butter both pandoro tins generously, making sure you've buttered into all the grooves.

Divide the dough between the 2 tins, weighing approximately 750g into each. The dough will only fill about a third of the tin, but don't worry if this looks a bit meagre. It will rise by another third in the proving, and a final third in the baking.

If your kitchen is at an ambient temperature of about 20-22°C, allow to prove for about 5 hours. If your kitchen is cold, you need to be patient and wait until the dough has doubled in size (or you can leave the dough to prove overnight in the fridge, which may give a deeper flavour. Just allow it to come back to room temperature before baking).

Step 6 (Bake):

About 30 minutes before the dough finishes proving, preheat your oven to 180°C/160°C fan-assisted/350°F/gas mark 4. Bake the pandoro for about 45 minutes, then test with a skewer to check for doneness; if it comes out with wet dough still sticking to it, leave for a few minutes more.



Remove from the oven. Once cooled enough for you to handle the tins comfortably, turn out onto wire racks (do not leave until completely cold, as they may then be difficult to remove.)

Allow to cool completely. Once cool, store in a plastic bag (I use a normal supermarket bag and tie the handles together). The pandoro stores remarkably well, and improves if left for a day or so. I have stored one for just over week with no ill effects, as long as it is cooled completely before being bagged, and is then kept airtight.

Dust with plenty of icing sugar before serving.

Notes:

With enriched doughs which have a high sugar, butter or spice content, the action of the yeast can be inhibited. Using osmotolerant yeast overcomes this, and will give you a much better rise than ordinary yeast as it is specifically developed for enriched dough.

Gas ovens can be fierce, and too hot an oven can melt the sugar and toast the edges of the dough, so cover with a loose-fitting lid of tinfoil if the pandoro looks as though it might 'catch' before it is cooked.

I favour using a Kenwood chef for making enriched dough, but whatever stand mixer you use, choose one with a large mixing bowl that aerates the dough well, and a high-powered engine. Please note that some smaller stand mixers cannot cope with the quantity or high-speed mixing time of this recipe.

Wrapping as a gift:

I still think that the best way to wrap a pandoro to give to your very best and dearest friend is to take a spotlessly clean sheet of clear cellophane, lie it flat, place the pandoro in the centre, and pull the wrapping up closely around it, tying it securely in place with a length of natural raffia or some ribbon, maybe in the green, white and red of the Italian flag.