

Autumn Brunch Pumpkin Maple French Toast – Comfort du Jour

This pumpkin challah French toast embraces all the sweet flavors of autumn. It has a luxurious, custard-like filling made with mascarpone, maple, spice and everything nice, and it's topped with a fresh apple and toasted pecan relish for a contrasting texture and bite.

My recipe begins with my own sourdough pumpkin challah, but you may purchase any regular challah or brioche from your supermarket bakery. I'll offer an easy way to get the same autumnal flavor into your French toast. Recipe makes enough for two very satisfying servings.

INGREDIENTS

4 large slices challah or brioche, slightly stale* (see notes)
3 oz. mascarpone*
2 Tbsp. maple cream*
1/4 tsp. cinnamon
3 eggs
1/2 cup whole milk
1/4 cup pure pumpkin puree (not pie filling)
1/2 tsp. vanilla extract
Pinch of kosher or sea salt

Maple syrup for serving, or make the warm apple-pecan topping (recipe follows)

*NOTES

Challah and brioche are similar “eggy” breads—each has a light and airy crumb, and both are perfectly suited for French toast, including this recipe. The primary difference is that brioche is made with butter and challah (being a popular Jewish bread) is frequently made with oil. Leave the slices unwrapped overnight, as the stale texture will force them to better absorb the egg mixture.

Mascarpone is an Italian-style cream cheese, but a bit richer and denser. I buy it in small tubs at Trader Joe's. Regular cream cheese would also work fine in this recipe.

Maple cream—oh, sweet wonderful maple cream! This delightful confection is pure maple, but in a different form from syrup. It's made by heating the syrup then whipping until it's a spreadable texture, similar to peanut butter. If you cannot find it, substitute about 1 tablespoon maple syrup.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Using a handheld mixer, whip together the mascarpone, maple cream and cinnamon until smooth and spreadable.
2. Spread maple-mascarpone mixture onto two slices of the challah or brioche, then top with remaining pieces to make two “sandwiches.”
3. Whisk together eggs, milk, pumpkin (if using) and vanilla. Pour some of the mixture in a flat glass baking dish and place the filled sandwiches in the egg mixture. Drizzle the remaining mixture over the sandwiches and turn several times for about 20 minutes until most of the mixture has been absorbed.

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4. Heat a skillet or griddle over medium-low heat. When it's evenly heated, place sandwiches on the griddle and cook until the underside is golden brown. Turn sandwiches over, taking care not to allow the top piece to slip off. Cook until the second side is golden brown.
5. Serve warm with maple syrup, or go crazy and make the warm apple-pecan relish (below).

FOR WARM APPLE RELISH TOPPING:

- 1 medium firm apple, chopped into bite-sized pieces
- 1 tsp. fresh lemon juice (to prevent browning)
- 2 Tbsp. chopped toasted pecans
- 1 Tbsp. maple sugar (or syrup)
- 1/4 tsp. pumpkin pie spice or cinnamon

Squeeze lemon juice over apple pieces in a small microwave-safe bowl and stir to toss. Microwave for 30 seconds, just long enough to warm and slightly soften the apple bits. Stir in the pecans, maple sugar (or syrup) and spice. Divide over top of French toast.

FOR THE CRAN-CIDER COCKTAIL:

Make brunch even more special with a cran-cider cocktail. The prosecco bubbles, plus the tart and tangy flavor of the cranberry are welcome relief to so much richness.

- 2 oz. apple cider (I used spiced cider from Trader Joe's)
- 2 oz. cranberry juice cocktail
- 2 oz. prosecco or other bubbly (champagne, seltzer, ginger ale)

Combine ingredients in a champagne flute just before serving the French toast.