

BLACK SESAME JAPANESE MILK BREAD

(slightly modified from [Wakeandbakemama](#))

for the black sesame paste (can be made the day before):

½ cup toasted black sesame seeds, finely ground

½ cup granulated sugar

½ cup unsalted butter, softened

for the tangzhong:

6 tablespoons water

2 tablespoons bread flour

for the dough:

¼ cup whole milk

1 + ½ teaspoons active dry yeast

320 grams bread flour, plus up to 30 grams more

1 teaspoon salt

¼ cup sugar

¼ cup heavy whipping cream

1 tablespoon powdered milk (optional)

2 eggs, 1 for the dough and 1 for the egg wash

2 tablespoons butter, softened

splash of milk or water, for the egg wash

Make the sesame paste. Finely grind the black sesame seeds in a spice grinder. Add the sugar and softened butter. Pulse to make a paste. Transfer to a small bowl, cover, and set aside. You can refrigerate this in advance. Before using, bring to room temperature to ensure it has a spreadable consistency.

Make the tangzhong. In a small saucepan, whisk together 6 tablespoons of water and 2 tablespoons of bread flour until no lumps remain. Heat the mixture over medium-low heat, whisking constantly. It should thicken to a gel-like consistency after just a few minutes. As soon as lines appear in the mixture when stirred, remove it from the heat and transfer it to a small, clean bowl. Let cool to room temperature.

Make the dough. Heat the milk briefly to just above room temperature, about 110° F or lukewarm to the touch. Sprinkle the yeast over the milk and set it aside for 5 minutes for the yeast to activate.

In the meantime, whisk together 2 1/2 cups of the bread flour, salt, and sugar in a large bowl. In a smaller bowl or a measuring cup, whisk together the tangzhong, cream, milk powder (if using), and one egg.

Add the yeast mixture to the wet ingredients, and whisk gently, just to incorporate. Make a well in the dry ingredients and pour in all of the wet ingredients. Stir with a wooden spoon until the mixture forms a loose, shaggy dough, then switch to using your hands. Knead for 4 to 5 minutes, or until the dough forms a semi-smooth ball. The dough will be quite sticky — sprinkle the extra 1/4 cup flour, a tablespoon or so at a time, over the dough and your hands as you knead to keep it from sticking too much. I usually use at least 2 tablespoons and often up to the full amount, but you may not need it all.

Add the butter to the dough, one tablespoon at a time, kneading after each addition. Add the second tablespoon of butter only after the first has been evenly incorporated. The dough will be slippery and messy at this point, but just keep kneading and it should eventually form a soft and pliable dough that's easy to work with. Knead for an additional 4 to 5 minutes, or until the dough becomes smooth and elastic. Place the dough in a large bowl and cover the bowl with plastic wrap or a damp towel. Let rise for 1 to 2 hours, or until doubled.

Once the dough is doubled gently deflate the dough and roll it out as a large rectangle. Spread the black sesame paste all over it, leaving a small border free of paste. Roll the dough from the long side, forming a cylinder, with the seam down. Using a sharp knife, slice the dough almost all the way through, and open the halves, exposing the center. Twist the two strands around, making sure the inner layers are facing up. Carefully drop it inside a loaf pan (9 x 5 in works fine), and allow it to rise covered for another hour, hour and a half. Meanwhile, heat the oven to 350F.

Whisk your second egg with a splash of milk or water, and brush the egg wash over the dough. Bake for about 30 minutes, or until golden-brown on top. Internal temp should be 200 degrees F. Let it cool completely before slicing.