

Keeping track of which strand is which in the pattern is the key to successful braiding. Two- and three-strand braids are simple enough to execute, but braiding gets tricky when you increase the number of strands to four or more. We've used colored strands of dough in our photographs to make the steps easier to follow visually. The lessons learned on one braided loaf can apply to another; the same repeating pattern applies to

braids that contain an even number of strands (see page 187) and another repeating sequence applies to braids with odd-numbered strands (see page 188). Shaping a four-strand challah, for example, is essentially the same as braiding a 24-strand challah, such as the one pictured on the previous page.

As you braid, try not to pull on the strands too much because this will make them thinner in some spots and thicker in others. We intentionally made our strands thicker at the middle and thinner at the ends to give the loaf an oblong shape. We *do* suggest rolling the ends over and tucking them under the loaf once the braid is complete so that the strands fuse to each other. This will keep the whole braid neatly in place during proofing and baking. After the dough is shaped, you can brush it with oil or an egg wash before proofing. After you proof the dough and it is ready for baking, you may egg wash it again. A double egg washing will make for a darker and shinier crust.

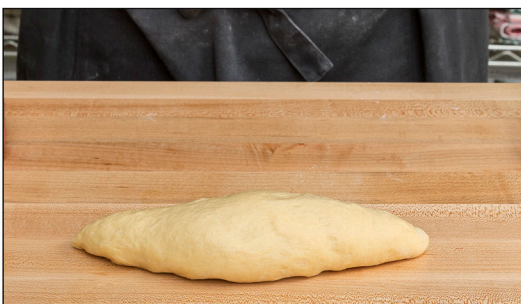


After you complete your braid, roll the tips of the strands together to seal the end of the loaf. Tuck the ends under the loaf to help keep the braid in place.

HOW TO Shape Strands for Braiding

You will need to rest the dough twice before it is ready to braid, first after preshaping and then again for a briefer period in the middle of rolling out the strips of dough. If you attempt to roll out the dough to its full length all at once, it may spring back in rather than extend all the way to the desired length. You will find that a few additional minutes

of rest are enough to make the dough cooperate fully. Once the strips are rolled out to the appropriate length for the loaf, you will need to put them on a flat surface you can move. For easy portability, we chose a length that corresponds to the span of a sheet pan and most wooden boards.



1 Preshape each piece of dough into a simple batard shape by following steps 1–3 on page 154.



2 Roll the dough out with your fingertips in a back-and-forth rolling motion, extending your arms out little by little, until the strand is about **45 cm / 18 in** long. Be sure to leave the center thick and taper the ends.



3 Let the dough rest for 5–10 minutes, well covered with a clean plastic bag or tarp, before rolling it out to the intended length.



4 Once the dough strips are rolled out, you may braid the strands (see the methods described on the following pages) or chill them. Chilling them will allow for better and easier handling because the cold will firm up the dough. Keeping the strips well covered with a clean plastic bag or tarp during refrigeration will protect the dough's surface from drying out.