

Manhattan babas

While living in California the Manhattan has been my most favourite cocktail, and the apartment has been stocked with the necessary ingredients at all times, which I suppose is why my rum babas ended up as Manhattan babas. They did not disappoint. You could make the more traditional version instead, or dream up another. I think an Old Fashioned Baba would be delicious too...



Serves: 6

Time: 4 ½ hours (including over 2 hours of Manhattan testing time)

60 ml (¼ cup) milk

1 tsp active dry yeast

2 tbsps sugar, plus a pinch to wake up the yeast

250g (2 cups) plain flour

¼ tsp (regular table) salt

2 large eggs

55g (2 oz) unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces and left in fridge

more butter, left out to become soft, for buttering moulds

19 Maraschino cherries, drained from their syrup and halved (NB Keep syrup)

Manhattan syrup:

290g (1½ cups) sugar

710 ml (3 cups) water

240ml (1 cup) good bourbon

4-8 tbsps Maraschino cherry syrup (from the jar of cherries above), to taste

6-12 tbsps sweet red vermouth, to taste

a dash of Angostura bitters

1. Go out and buy 6 'baba moulds'. They look like miniature flowerpots.
2. Heat milk until lukewarm. Mix in yeast and a pinch of sugar. Let sit for a few minutes – the yeast should wake up and create a froth on the surface.
3. In a bowl (ideally your electric stand-mixer bowl, if you have one), mix together 2 tbsps sugar with flour and salt. Create a well in centre.

4. Add eggs to milk mixture and whisk til combined.
5. Pour eggy milk into dry ingredients and beat together until smooth and elastic. This will take at least 5 minutes, and will be better if you go on for 10. If using an electric stand-mixer, use dough hook (or paddle attachment if you don't have the hook) and periodically stop motor, open up, scrape dough off hook and sides of bowl, flip dough over so underside is on top, and then resume mixing. If mixing by hand, slightly cup fingers and slap dough about inside bowl as violently and quickly as you can.
6. Scrape dough into a clean bowl. Place pieces of chilled butter on top. Cover and leave in a warm room to rise for 1½ hrs, or until doubled in size.
7. Meanwhile, generously grease moulds with the butter you left out to soften.
8. Also, practise making Manhattans (see below).
9. Add all except 6 cherry halves to bowl and knead them and butter (which should by now be perfectly soft) into dough until well-combined.
10. Divide dough between moulds so each is no more than $\frac{3}{4}$ full. Smooth tops, just a bit, if really misshapen. Decorate with reserved cherry halves.
11. Sit babas in a warm room for an hour, or until they rise to top of moulds.
12. Meanwhile heat oven to 230C (450F) and make syrup: Place sugar, water and bourbon in a saucepan, heat gently and stir slowly until sugar has dissolved. Stir in other ingredients, to taste. Let cool.
13. When babas reach tops of their moulds, check cherry adornments are still in place, put on a baking sheet and bake at 230C (450F) for 10 mins. Reduce temperature to 175C (350F) and continue baking another 5 mins. They should rise right up above their moulds and go golden brown on top. Remove and let cool a few mins. Remove from tins and carefully spike in several places all over with a skewer. Place in a tub with the syrup and soak for *at least* half an hour, turning babas over and re-skewering as needed, until babas are *entirely* soaked through with syrup.
14. Serve immediately or, even better, store in fridge sitting in some syrup and well covered for a few hours or over night before serving.



Other things to make:

- *Rum babas*: Omit cherries. Use raisins instead if you wish. Make a rum syrup: 380g (2 cups sugar), 945ml (4 cups) water, 240ml (1 cup) rum.
- *Manhattans*: Place bourbon or rye whisky and red vermouth in a cocktail shaker using a ratio of anything between 1 part each to 1 part vermouth to 5 parts whisky. I like it dry, so use very little vermouth. Add ice, a dash of Angostura bitters and a few drops of Maraschino cherry syrup. Shake vigorously. Strain into a cocktail glass. Garnish with a Maraschino cherry.