

Bringing a Taste of France Home with "Quick" Vegan Croissants

Hannah Kaminsky, of Bittersweet and My Sweet Vegan ~ Paris. If anyone can sum up that city in just a few succinct paragraphs, I would be highly suspicious of how much they actually went out and experienced there. Overwhelmed by all of the words that could be said, the myriad of stories that could be told, after a mere 5 1/2 days of total immersion in the capital of France, I found it impossible to pick and choose the right ones at all. (However, if you want to know more about the photos I posted, you can now see a few brief descriptions and explanations on Flickr.) Speechless, stunned, and yet brimming with inspiration, I was back at work in the kitchen again as soon as we walked through the door.

Suitcases still stuffed, with both dirty laundry and happy memories, the familiar scent of buttery pastries began floating through the air, as if we had never left Paris at all. This time, however, I could actually enjoy those flaky delicacies, instead of solely photographing them.

I'll be the first to admit that these are no where near as grand as those massive breakfast confections, but for a first try, I was pleasantly surprised by the outcome. Cut into miniature sizes, each croissant was but two bites each, but unarguably rich enough to quell any further hunger.

Despite how intimidating the hundreds of paper-thin layers may seem, croissants are actually quite simple to make; it's the waiting and repetition that might become a bit trying. Luckily, I found a recipe for "quick" croissants, which can produce fresh, homemade pastries from start to finish in about 3 hours. Adapting it to better suit my American cups and teaspoons, while also easily veganizing it, this is definitely a good starting place for anyone who wants to give croissants a try for themselves.

Basic Vegan Croissants Dough:

2 1/4 Cups Bread Flour

1 Teaspoon Active Dry Yeast

1/2 Cup + 2 Teaspoons Water

1 Teaspoon Salt

2 Tablespoons + 2 Teaspoons Granulated Sugar

1 1/2 Tablespoons Melted Margarine* "Butter" Block:

9 Tablespoons Margarine, Frozen*

To make the dough, start by combining all of the dry ingredients together in a large bowl until well distributed. Mix everything together and knead until a smooth dough is formed. Let rest in the fridge for 20-30 minutes. Add in the water and melted margarine, and stir thoroughly to incorporate. Turn the dough out onto a floured surface and kneed by hand for about 10 - 15 minutes, until smooth and elastic. Place in a lightly greased bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and let rest in the refrigerator for about 30 minutes.

While the dough chills, you can go ahead and prepare the "butter" block.

It helps to start by cutting the margarine into sizable chunks and arranging them right next to each other in as even of a rectangle as possible on top of a silpat or piece of parchment paper. Sandwich the margarine in between another silpat or sheet of parchment paper, and using your rolling pin, whack it into submission. You want to flatten the block out to about 1 cm or so high, and try to keep the sides even and rectangular. Allow it to chill in the fridge for 20-30 minutes.

Once properly chilled, roll the dough out into a rectangle about twice as large as your "butter" block. Place the "butter" block in the center, diagonal to the sides (not parallel.) Enclose the block like an envelope, bringing the corners of the dough in to meet at the center. Roll the whole thing out gently to a thickness of about 1 cm again, and fold the short sides in by thirds. Return it to the fridge so that it can chill for another 20 minutes before proceeding. Don't be tempted to hasten this time, as the heat from your hands and the rolling pin will make all of the margarine melt and run out. It's essential to keep this dough as cool as possible before it hits the oven!

The folding and shaping process is rather difficult to describe in words, so don't worry if you're a bit confused. Just check out the very helpful photos over at WikiHow and Joe Pastry if you need a visual aid.

Roll out the dough into a rectangle yet again, and fold in thirds as before. Chill for the same amount of time, and then repeat this process once more. Chill the dough for 20 more minutes before shaping it.

To shape your croissants, roll the dough out into a rectangle as before, but cut it with a very sharp knife into equal triangles. If you want mini croissants, cut the dough in half lengthwise first, and then cut your triangles. Roll each triangle up, starting at the widest side, and place each one on a fresh silpat or piece of parchment paper. Once all the croissants are cut and rolled, let them rise in a warm place for about 75 minutes, until nearly doubled in size.

After rising, move the croissants into a preheated 415 degree oven. As soon as they're safely inside, reduce the

heat to 350 degrees, and do not open the door again until 15 minutes has elapsed. They should be golden brown, but if not, bake for an additional 5 – 10 minutes as necessary. Let cool before enjoying the fruits of your labor!

* Editor's Note: Hannah says a stick margarine is really needed for best results rather than a tub version. We recommend Earth Balance Buttery Sticks since they are free from hydrogenated oils and dairy-free / vegan. Hannah Kaminsky blogs at Bittersweet, and she is the author of the popular dessert cookbook, My Sweet Vegan. Hannah also has several vegan mini e-cookbooks available, including Lunch Box Bites, A La Mode, and Mission: Impossible Pies.