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Bavarian Pretzels, *Laugenbretzel*, "New German Cooking," [TX 721 .N65 2014]

Pretzels:

235g room-temperature water
5g sugar
35 g unsalted butter
55g buttermilk
30g fresh yeast
130 g bread flour
430g all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
5g kosher salt

Lye dip (read cautionary info carefully!)

2 cups/480 ml cold water
15g food -grade lye

Topping: pretzel salt (available from The Head Nut at Reading Terminal Market)

I don't have a stand mixer, so I just made it by hand.

1. In a large bowl using a whisk, mix the water, sugar, butter, buttermilk and yeast until the yeast is dissolved, the butter will still be lumpy.
2. Add the flour and salt slowly, mixing wet and dry ingredients bit by bit with the whisk until it becomes too thick, then use your hands.
3. Once the dough is together, transfer to a kneading surface. Knead a good 7 - 10 minutes.
4. Let the dough rise in a warm place 30-40 minutes. Meanwhile, read the lye cautions and prepare the dip and your baking sheets.

Lye* dip:

VERY IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

- Lye is highly caustic (corrosive) - proceed with caution.
- Do not use metal, especially not aluminum. Lye and aluminum will produce a poison gas. Therefore...
- Line your baking sheets with parchment paper.

- Only mix the solution in a glass or plastic bowl with plastic cookware. (Lye will stain wood black).
- Wear gloves.

Preparing the lye dip: for best practices, add the powdered lye to the cold water, not the other way around. Stir until the lye is dissolved.

Shape the pretzels:

1. Punch the dough down. This amount makes 6 large, or 12 medium soft pretzels. Divide the dough according to your desired amount.
2. Roll out the pieces of dough until you have long coils. Watch some YouTube videos on how to shape the pretzels.
3. Wearing gloves, carefully dip each pretzel in the lye solution, and place on a parchment lined baking sheet.
4. Allow the pretzels to rest 15-20 minutes. Meanwhile, pre-heat the oven to 375F.
5. Sprinkle the pretzel salt on and bake for 15-20 minutes depending on the size you make. You will know when they are ready by how they smell, delicious!

*More about lye:

1. If lye is so toxic, why are we using it? This is the traditional way to make pretzels.
2. How was this lye-dip thing discovered? No idea. The guess is that perhaps a proving pretzel accidentally fell into the bucket of lye cleaning solution sitting next to the oven. Hygiene not being what it is in the 21st century, the baker picked it out of the bucket and tossed it into the oven with the rest, and history was made!
3. Why does the lye solution work? The lye and the bread dough combined, create the Maillard reaction, the chemical reaction which makes the dark, glossy brown crust while leaving the soft pretzel on the inside. The lye also gives the pretzel its unique flavor. An alternative option is to use baking soda instead. But all reviews report that it does not produce the signature taste.
4. Where can I purchase "food grade" lye? Is there such a thing? Yes there "is" but really, lye is lye is lye (sodium hydroxide). It's going to clean your toilet bowl and plumbing pipes whether its food grade or not. The only difference I could find is that "Food Grade Lye" is sold in small quantities for a lot of money online, but "regular" lye is sold in a good quantity for cheap at the hardware store. So I bought mine at 10th St. Hardware.
5. How do I dispose of the lye dip? This project is a twofer! Yummy pretzels and clean pipes. Pour it down the drain. Be sure to run cold water for a little bit after dumping the solution to be sure it is rinsed from your pipes. If you put it in the toilet, give it one or two extra flushes.