

Hot cross buns: traditions and silliness (oh and a recipe)



Kate is a big fan of hot cross buns, I, to be honest, don't really see what's so fantastic about them. But hey ho, that doesn't mean I can't experiment with making some so Kate can have a treat.

Just in case you live somewhere in the world where hot cross buns haven't already appeared on supermarket shelves, in bakeries and in adverts, basically they are a spiced bun with dried fruit and citrus which get eaten traditionally around spring time in the UK. They have a cross marked on top which I suppose is why they get associated with easter.

As with most traditional foods, there is no definite evidence of where they originated or when, but tradition says that these originated with a monk in St Albans in the 14th century.

The spices and cross were said to be representative of Jesus being crucified and his body embalmed.

Folklore in the UK include:

- buns baked and served on Good Friday will not spoil or grow mouldy during the subsequent year,
- if someone is ill a piece of hot cross bun will help them recover,
- hot cross buns are said to protect against shipwreck, and
- If hung in the kitchen, they will protect against fires and make sure that all your bread turn out perfect. You need to replace the hanging bun each year though.

Regardless of how true any of this is, let's make some buns.

Ingredients

for the buns

- 250ml milk
- 50g butter
- 500g bread flour
- 1 tsp salt
- 80g sugar
- Tbsp fast-action yeast
- 1 beaten egg
- 75g dried fruit (raisins and sultanas)
- 50g mixed peel

- zest 1 orange
- juice of said orange
- 1 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 tsp cardamom

For the cross (or other decoration)

- 75g plain flour
- about 6 tbsp water

For the glaze

- 3 tbsp marmalade

Let's bake

Ok first thing, warm your milk. Keep an eye on this as if it boils over, it's a nightmare to clean up. Once it is warm to the touch, take it off the heat and add the butter to melt into it. Give it a wee stir.

Next, add your dry ingredients to a bowl or your mixer bowl, (flour, salt, sugar and yeast). Add your beaten egg, and the milk / butter mixture. Give this a good mix to bring it together and knead, either by hand or with the dough hook for about 5 mins until it is smooth and elastic. It is meant to be a slightly sticky dough, so don't worry. It will come together, just be patient. Add the dried fruit, peel, zest and spices to the dough and give it a good knead to incorporate.

Put it into an oiled bowl, cover it and put it aside to rise for about an hour. Until it has doubled in size.

Once it's risen, punch it back by giving it another short knead and then cover and leave it aside again. Once it's doubled in size... do it again, yep knead it and then cover it and put it aside to rise again.

So that's two rises (is that the right word)?

Once the dough has risen for the second time, divide the dough into even pieces, I usually get about 14 or 15. Roll each piece into a smooth ball and arrange the buns on a big baking tray or two if you don't have one big enough. Leave enough space for the balls to expand, but I like the whole thing of them touching when they are baked so you have to tear them apart (like bread rolls) so I don't give them masses of space, about a cm.

Cover them with a tea towel or put them in a proving bag if you have one and leave them to double in size again. I know, I know, but it's worth it, trust me, they will be soooo scrumptious. It will probably be between half an hour and an hour. Meanwhile you can preheat your oven to 220C/200C fan.

Once they are risen, for the decoration on top, be it a cross, a smiley face etc, mix 75g plain flour with about 6 tbsp water to make a paste. You want it to be thick enough so that it doesn't fall out of the piping bag. Add the water 1 tbsp at a time so that you don't add too much if it isn't needed.

Then put that into a piping bag and pipe your design onto each bun. A cross is easiest as you can do this in big lines across the whole batch but feel free to get creative. I went with some hearts for Kate... awwwww!



Bake for 20 mins on the middle shelf of the oven, until golden brown.

For the glaze

Gently heat 3 tbsp marmalade to melt it, then while it's still warm, brush it over the top of the buns and leave to cool.

Warning this makes them really sticky! REALLY sticky!

Now go eat. Kate prefers them cut in half and toasted with butter and marmalade spread on each half, but they also make fantastic french toast ☐



Kanelbuller, Kanelsnegl or plain old cinnamon buns. A tasty treat for a winter weekend



I've always been a huge fan of what I call cinnamon swirls (kanelsnegl, in Danish they are called cinnamon snails), you know, the Danish pastry type treats where a mix of cinnamon, butter, and sugar is swirled inside a roll of flaky, sweet pastry? I love them, but on a recent

trip to New York, we discovered another version, the kanelbuller. Simply, a cinnamon bun, traditional in Sweden. They even have a national cinnamon bun day (Oct 4th), why don't I live in Sweden? I have completely fallen in love with these and have been trying to get the perfect recipe ever since.

They are a perfect treat with a cup of tea or coffee for those cold, fresh winter weekends when you just want to curl up inside with a book and I thin they are about to become our latest christmas day tradition.

The recipe is getting there so I thought I'd share with you guys, and even better, this is a chance for you to practice your sourdough skills on something other than a loaf of bread.

Ingredients – for the dough

- 400g bread flour
- 150g sourdough starter
- 50g melted butter
- around 200ml warm milk
- 5g salt
- 100g sugar
- 2 tsp ground cardamom (it just give the buns... something which you can't put your finger on)
- an egg to brush the buns

Ingredients – for the filling

- 120g soft butter
- 100g sugar
- 2 tsp ground cinnamon

Get to work

You are making an enriched bread dough, so add all your ingredients to your big mixing bowl and get to work bringing it together with your hands until it's a nice ball of dough.

I've found when working with sourdough, that the water content of the starter varies, so don't add all the milk in one go. Add a bit at a time until you have a good dough consistency, you may not need all the milk. You want the dough to be firm but not too dry. A wetter dough makes for a lighter finished product.

Once you have the dough ready, get kneading. Give the dough a knead for about ten minutes until it's soft and springy to the touch.

If you aren't sure about kneading, there's a handy "how to"

video over on our YouTube channel.

[How to knead dough](#)

Once you are happy you have a lovely springy dough, put it back into the bowl, cover with some clingfilm and leave it in a warm room to rise. You want it to double in size, this can take anything from an hour to all day. As we are using sourdough for this recipe, it's more likely to take all day, but just keep an eye on it.

Getting all creative

Once the dough is ready, you want to roll this out to about 3 or 4mm thick, into a rectangle. Or as near to a rectangle as you can. I have never once managed to get any dough to be a nice neat rectangle without serious coercion, so just get your best approximation of a rectangle.

Now its time to get the filling ready.

You need to cream your butter and sugar together until its completely combined and super soft, then mix in the cinnamon. This doesn't look attractive in your mixing bowl, I admit, but just trust me on this one, it will taste divine.

Ok, I will not lie to you, this is the tricky (read impossible) bit. You need to spread that lovely filling all over your rectangle of dough. Sounds simple enough right?

Wrong!

Every recipe I've seen, every video I watched, they all spread the filling really easily using a pallet knife or a spoon. I am sorry, but this beautiful pillowy, soft dough does not want the filling spread on it, no matter how soft I went, no matter what implement I used... the dough moved and the filling stayed put.

So... here is my top tip, just use your fingers. It's messy but it works!



So now that the drama of trying to spread the filling is over, time to make those fabulous little knot shaped buns. You start by folding the dough over itself, so basically you are folding it in half, lengthways. Not sure if that is the right description, but basically fold along the short end so you still have a long, but now thin rectangle.

Now cut that rectangle in half to create two squares (or as near to squares as you were to a rectangle at the start).

Then again cut in half, and again until you have some thick little rectangles of filled doughy goodness. Which you are going to cut again, but this time not all the way through, kinda like you are giving them little legs.



Now the messy but fun part begins. Grab the right leg and twist it clockwise. Then grab the left and twist it anti-clockwise.

I have no idea how to describe the result to you, so here's a picture! Make this ☐



The next maneuver is again difficult to explain, but basically take one twisty leg, and wrap it around in a semi-circle. Like left twisty leg goes around the left and joins the top of the dough. Next, take the right twisty leg and pull it over the

top and tuck it underneath at the top.

Again, I'm better showing you a picture.



Little knot like buns created, its time to leave them to rise again. You got it, you want them to double in size.

The last stage, when they have doubled, get that oven preheated to 180 C, and while that's heating, beat your egg and brush it over the buns, this makes a nice shiny finish. At this stage, if you wanted to you can even add some sugar nibs to make them pretty.

And voila... tasty sourdough cinnamon buns.

