

MARCH

Baking School In-Depth: Hot Cross Buns

Nothing sweetly symbolizes Easter season quite like hot cross buns. For centuries, they have been baked and enjoyed on Good Friday, marking the end of the Lenten season. They make a memorable addition to any springtime brunch with their orange blossom-and-almond paste-crossed tops, array of warming spices, and orange juice-plumped currants and candied orange peel studded throughout. While these are best served warm, straight from the oven, a day-old bun that's toasted and generously buttered will not disappoint!



INGREDIENT BREAKDOWN

Excellent recipes require wonderful ingredients. Here's how our recipe's ingredients contribute to making the very best hot cross buns.

CURRENTS AND ORANGE JUICE: Dried currants are actually teeny raisins made by drying a variety of seedless black grapes known as Black Corinth. When these dried fruits are steeped in the hot orange juice, they plump up and give the buns a wonderful fruity chew.

WHOLE MILK: We use milk to add fat and flavor to our dough. Milk contains natural sugars that begin browning when heated between 212°F (100°C) and 350°F (180°C), which contributes to the beautiful bronze color of these hot cross buns as a result of a reaction occurring between the reducing sugars in the milk and the amino acids or proteins. The milk in this recipe is also warmed to keep the dough warm, setting it up for a fruitful first rise.

WATER: Moisture (in the form of water here) is needed to activate the yeast and hydrate the dough so the gluten can develop and build elasticity in the dough. Also, the water converts to steam, which helps prevent the crust from browning too quickly while baking.

UNSALTED BUTTER: Butter adds decadence to the enriched dough, creating moist, tender buns. Melting the butter in the milk and water not only helps cool down the mixture but it also means the melted butter incorporates more smoothly and evenly, ensuring consistency in flavor and texture in every bite.

BREAD FLOUR: High-protein flour is essential for this recipe to create a strong gluten network with enough protein content to form gluten and to handle the enrichment added to this dough and all the mix-ins.

GRANULATED SUGAR: Sugar acts as food for the yeast, which converts it to carbon dioxide and alcohol in the fermentation process. This helps make the dough tender, creating soft and supple buns, and adds a tiny bit of sweetness without making the buns overly sweet. Sugar also helps balance the salt, contributes to the buns' golden color, and retains moisture while the buns bake.



INGREDIENT BREAKDOWN

RED STAR® ALL-NATURAL ACTIVE DRY YEAST: A standard when it comes to baking with yeast, Red Star® All-Natural Active Dry Yeast is a tried-and-true favorite for a reason. Yeast is essential to many bread doughs, and this Hot Cross Buns recipe is no exception. It needs sugar to feed on, warmth, and moisture for proper fermentation. Yeast acts as the main leavening agent in these buns, so it's important that it's not killed when combined with the warm liquid in this recipe.

KOSHER SALT: As a rule of thumb, the ratio of salt to flour in breads is 1.8% to 2% of flour weight. It's important to weigh your salt because different salt crystals measure differently. Dough without enough salt can easily over-ferment. Salt also helps with the color of the Hot Cross Buns and enhances the overall flavor.

GROUND CINNAMON, NUTMEG, AND ALLSPICE: This combination of spices provides the perfect depth and flavor to the buns, with the slight sweetness of cinnamon, earthiness from the nutmeg, and the fresh, sharp woodiness of allspice. Together, they form a well-balanced blend that especially complements the citrus in the buns.

EGGS: The addition of an egg in this dough not only adds richness but also helps with leavening, as the egg white helps create steam that puffs up your dough once it hits the warmth of the oven. We also use an egg wash on the buns before they are baked; it creates a beautiful shine, enhances browning, and acts as a moisture barrier after the buns come out of the oven.

CANDIED ORANGE PEEL: Candied orange peel is vibrant citrus peel transformed into sweet, luminous little bursts of citrusy flavor that make a lovely addition to these buns, both for their taste and their delightful chewy bite. They pair beautifully with the orange juice-soaked currants and the orange blossom water.

ORANGE BLOSSOM WATER: The floral perfume of orange blossom water adds a beautiful springtime essence to the almond paste crosses piped on the top of the buns. Orange blossom water is delicate in flavor yet potent as well, so keep in mind a little bit goes a long way!



TOOLS OF THE TRADE

We recommend this set of tools for our technique



SCALE: Using a kitchen scale ensures you have perfectly equal portions of dough that will bake evenly. (Pictured is the [Zwilling Digital Scale](#).)

HAND MIXER: For our Orange Almond Paste, a hand mixer allows for all the power and speed you need but with more control. It's excellent at whipping air into mixtures that might not have enough volume for a stand mixer to effectively reach and mix. The use of a hand mixer saves you both time and energy. (Pictured is the [Breville Handy Mix Scraper 9-Speed Hand Mixer](#).)

THERMOMETER: We use an instant-read thermometer to ensure the correct temperature of milk and water when heating to add to the yeast mixture for optimal rise. (Pictured is the [OXO Thermocouple Thermometer](#).)

TOOLS OF THE TRADE



SAUCEPAN: You want a stainless steel saucepan that will heat efficiently and evenly with precise temperature control and no hot spots when heating the milk and water in the first steps of making the dough for the buns. (Pictured is the [Williams Sonoma Signature Thermo-Clad™ Stainless-Steel Saucepan](#).)

BAKING PAN: Designed to bake evenly, this commercial-quality pan is crafted of aluminized steel for exceptional durability. Its nonstick finish allows for easy release of the Hot Cross Buns and a speedy cleanup. (Pictured is the [Williams Sonoma Goldtouch® Pro Nonstick Rectangular Cake Pan](#).)

SPATULA, PASTRY BRUSHES, BENCH SCRAPER, AND GLASS BOWLS: For all your mixing needs, you really can't beat the basics. Spatulas are perfect for simple stirring and folding, pastry brushes are essential for brushing the buns with egg wash and glazing with the Simple Syrup after they bake, the bench scraper helps you divide the dough evenly, and glass bowls give you a 360-degree visual in every step of this recipe, from watching the dough rise to whipping together the Orange Almond Paste. (Pictured is the [Williams Sonoma Silicone Spatula with Stainless-Steel Handle](#), [Williams Sonoma Olivewood Pastry Brushes](#), [Williams Sonoma Olivewood Bench Scraper](#), and [Glass Mixing Bowl 10-Piece Set](#).)

HOT CROSS
BUNS



HOT CROSS BUNS

Makes 12 buns

These cozy buns make a treasured addition to an Easter brunch. Rich with spices and studded with orange peel and currants soured in orange juice, crossed with Orange Almond Paste, and finished with Simple Syrup, they are divine!

- 1 cup (128 grams) dried currants
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (180 grams) hot fresh orange juice (180°F/82°C to 185°F/85°C)
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (180 grams) whole milk
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (120 grams) water
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup (76 grams) unsalted butter, cubed
- $4\frac{3}{4}$ cups plus $\frac{2}{3}$ cup (688 grams) bread flour, divided
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (50 grams) granulated sugar
- 2 (0.25-ounce) packages (14 grams) active dry yeast*
- 4 teaspoons (12 grams) kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon (2 grams) ground cinnamon
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon (1 gram) ground nutmeg
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground allspice
- 2 large eggs (100 grams), room temperature and divided
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup (90 grams) chopped candied orange peel

Orange-Almond Paste (recipe follows)

Sugar Syrup (recipe follows)

1. In a small bowl, combine currants and hot orange juice. Cover with plastic wrap, and let stand for 20 minutes. Using a fine-mesh sieve, strain currants well, discarding excess liquid.
2. In a medium saucepan, heat milk and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (120 grams) water over medium heat to scalding. (An instant-read thermometer should register 180°F/82°C.) Remove from heat, and add butter; stir occasionally until butter is melted and an instant-read thermometer registers 120°F (49°C) to 130°F (54°C).
3. In the bowl of a stand mixer, combine $2\frac{1}{2}$ cups (318 grams) flour, sugar, yeast, salt, cinnamon, nutmeg, and allspice. Add hot milk mixture to flour mixture; using the paddle attachment, beat at low speed until well combined. Add 1 egg

(50 grams), beating until combined. Gradually add $2\frac{2}{3}$ cups (296 grams) flour, beating until combined; scrape sides of bowl.

4. Switch to the dough hook attachment. Beat at low speed until dough is smooth and elastic, 6 to 8 minutes. (Dough will not be sticky and will pass the windowpane test; see Note.) Add currants and candied orange peel, and beat until evenly incorporated, 3 to 4 minutes. Add $\frac{1}{3}$ cup (42 grams) flour, and beat until a soft, somewhat sticky dough forms, 14 to 16 minutes; add up to remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (32 grams) flour, 1 tablespoon (8 grams) at a time, if dough is too sticky. (Dough will pass the windowpane test.) Turn out dough onto a clean surface; knead 3 to 4 times, and shape into a smooth round.

5. Spray a large bowl with cooking spray. Place dough in bowl, turning to grease top. Loosely cover and let rise in a warm, draft-free place (75°F/24°C) until doubled in size, 1 to $1\frac{1}{2}$ hours.

6. Spray a 13x9-inch baking pan with cooking spray.

7. Lightly punch down dough, and let stand for 5 minutes. Turn out dough onto a clean surface, and divide into 12 portions (about 122 grams each). Roll each portion into a ball. Place about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch apart in prepared pan. Cover and let rise in a warm, draft-free place (75°F/24°C) until puffed, buns are touching, and dough holds an indentation when pressed, 45 minutes to 1 hour.

8. Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C).

9. In a small bowl, whisk remaining 1 egg (50 grams). Brush tops of buns with egg.

10. Spoon Orange-Almond Paste into a pastry bag fitted with a $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch round piping tip (Ateco #802). Pipe paste on top of buns in continuous lines following curves of buns to form a cross over each.

11. Bake until golden brown and an instant-read thermometer inserted in center registers 190°F (88°C) to 200°F (93°C), about 30 minutes, loosely covering with foil after

15 minutes of baking to prevent excess browning. Let cool for 5 minutes; brush tops with Sugar Syrup. Serve warm or at room temperature.

**We used Red Star® All-Natural Active Dry Yeast.*

Note: *To use the windowpane test to check dough for proper gluten development, lightly flour hands and pinch off (don't tear) a small piece of dough. Slowly pull the dough out from the center. If the dough is ready, you will be able to stretch it until it's thin and translucent like a windowpane. If the dough tears, it's not quite ready. Beat for 1 minute, and test again.*

ORANGE-ALMOND PASTE

Makes $\frac{1}{2}$ cup

- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (57 grams) unsalted butter, softened
- 2 tablespoons (14 grams) confectioners' sugar
- 1 teaspoon (5 grams) orange blossom water
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon kosher salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (31 grams) all-purpose flour
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (24 grams) almond flour

1. In a medium bowl, beat butter with a hand mixer at medium speed until smooth. Beat in confectioners' sugar, orange blossom water, and salt. Beat in flours until well combined.

SUGAR SYRUP

Makes 2 tablespoons

- $\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoons (18 grams) granulated sugar
- 1 tablespoon (15 grams) water

1. In a small microwave-safe bowl, stir together sugar and 1 tablespoon (15 grams) water. Heat on high in 15-second intervals, stirring between each, until sugar is melted. Let cool completely.

STEEPING THE CURRANTS

Soaking the dried currants in hot orange juice plumps them up, giving the currants a tart, tender chew that contrasts the soft, sweet dough beautifully



1. In a small bowl, combine currants and hot orange juice. Cover with plastic wrap, and let stand for 20 minutes. Using a fine-mesh sieve, strain currants well, discarding excess liquid. Aside from adding flavor and texture to the currants, this step ensures the currants aren't stealing any moisture from the dough.

TIME TO SCALD

Heating the milk and water to just the right temperature ensures the dough is warm enough for the perfect first rise but not so hot that it will kill the yeast



1. In a medium saucepan, heat milk and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup (120 grams) water over medium heat to scalding. (An instant-read thermometer should register 180°F/82°C.) Remove from heat, and add butter; stir occasionally until butter is melted and an instant-read thermometer registers 120°F (49°C) to 130°F (54°C). Scalding is an important step, as it breaks down and begins to weaken the whey protein that can keep the yeast from performing optimally. It's vital that this mixture does not come to a boil, because you begin losing valuable moisture as it evaporates out of the saucepan. The last step in this method is the cooldown. This guarantees the ideal temperature of the liquid so we don't kill the yeast.

MAKING THE DOUGH

It's time to combine all of the heavenly scented spices with the rest of the dough ingredients as we begin the dough-making process



2. In the bowl of a stand mixer, combine $2\frac{1}{2}$ cups (318 grams) flour, sugar, yeast, salt, cinnamon, nutmeg, and allspice. Add hot milk mixture to flour mixture; using the paddle attachment, beat at low speed until well combined. Add 1 egg (50 grams), beating until combined. Gradually add $2\frac{1}{3}$ cups (296 grams) flour, beating until combined; scrape sides of bowl. When you mix yeast into the dry ingredients, this is called the dry blending method. Only part of the flour is added so that the aromatic spices and enrichments are blended evenly. Using this method, we also have more control over the consistency of the final buns.

GETTING KNEADY

Allowing the stand mixer to do the bulk of the kneading and finishing kneading by hand just a few times is key to getting the perfect dough consistency



3. Switch to the dough hook attachment. Beat at low speed until dough is smooth and elastic, 6 to 8 minutes. (Dough will not be sticky and will pass the windowpane test; see Note.) Add currants and candied orange peel, and beat until evenly incorporated, 3 to 4 minutes. Add $\frac{1}{3}$ cup (42 grams) flour, and beat until a soft, somewhat sticky dough forms, 14 to 16 minutes; add up to remaining $\frac{1}{4}$ cup (32 grams) flour, 1 tablespoon (8 grams) at a time, if dough is too sticky. (Dough will pass the windowpane test.) Turn out dough onto a clean surface; knead 3 to 4 times, and shape into a smooth round. The stand mixer does all the hard work as the dough develops gluten before the fruity, citrusy components are added. The final kneading by hand is to fully incorporate the currants and orange peel into the dough and to make sure the dough is the perfect consistency.

LET IT RISE

Rising times vary depending on the environment, but keep in mind that the amount the dough has risen—the volume—is more important than how long it takes to rise



4. Spray a large bowl with cooking spray. Place dough in bowl, turning to grease top. Loosely cover and let rise in a warm, draft-free place (75°F/24°C) until doubled in size, 1 to 1½ hours.

A SPRINGY ORANGE-ALMOND PASTE

This topping can be made in advance and placed in the pastry bag so it's primed and prepped when you are ready to pipe the crosses onto the buns



1. In a medium bowl, beat butter with a hand mixer at medium speed until smooth. Beat in confectioners' sugar, orange blossom water, and salt. Beat in flours until well combined. You want the paste to be as smooth as possible so you get a nice, clean line when you pipe it onto the buns. This paste holds great at room temperature, so make it during the first or second dough rise, or whenever you have time. The important thing to remember if making it ahead of time is not to refrigerate it, as it will harden the butter in the paste.

GETTING INTO SHAPE

It's time to shape the buns



1. Spray a 13x9-inch baking pan with cooking spray.
2. Lightly punch down dough, and let stand for 5 minutes. Turn out dough onto a clean surface, and divide into 12 portions (about 122 grams each). Roll each portion into a ball. Place about $\frac{1}{4}$ inch apart in prepared pan. Cover and let rise in a warm, draft-free place (75°F/24°C) until puffed, and dough holds an indentation when poked, 45 to 1 hour. If you don't have a kitchen scale, divide the dough in half, roll into identical logs, and then divide the logs into 6 equal portions, trying to keep them as identical as possible. Cup your hand over the dough portions and gently rotate the dough on your countertop to get a tight, uniform ball.

BRUSHING WITH EGG WASH

The egg wash helps create a shiny and gloriously golden-brown crust on the tops of the buns



1. Preheat oven to 375°F (190°C).
2. In a small bowl, whisk remaining 1 egg (50 grams). Brush tops of rolls with egg.

THE PIPING OF THE CROSSES

Piping the most iconic component of the Hot Cross Buns



1. Spoon Orange-Almond Paste into a pastry bag fitted with a ¼-inch round piping tip (Ateco #802). Pipe paste on top of buns in continuous lines following curves of buns to form a cross over each.

BAKE AND GLAZE

Keep an eye on the buns as they bake, making sure to cover them to prevent excess browning. This Simple Syrup is a breeze to make, and it adds just the right amount of sweetness and shine to the baked buns.



1. Bake until golden brown and an instant-read thermometer inserted in center registers 190°F (88°C) to 200°F (93°C), about 30 minutes, loosely covering with foil after 15 minutes of baking to prevent excess browning. Let cool for 5 minutes; brush tops with Sugar Syrup. Serve warm or at room temperature. The Simple Syrup adds a lovely shine and a touch of sweetness, but it also acts as an extra barrier to help keep the tray of buns fresher longer.