

Hot cross buns, Mrs Beeton's way



Ingredients

- 450g (2.5 cups) plain flour, sifted
- 100g (scant 1/2 cup) soft brown sugar
- 1/2 cup currants
- 3 tablespoons mixed peel
- 1 teaspoon mixed spice or ground allspice
- pinch salt
- 7g (1 sachet) dried yeast
- 250ml (1 cup) milk, warmed
- 110g butter, melted
- 2 tablespoons sugar, for glaze

Note

Hot cross buns are traditionally served on a Good Friday. This recipe is based on Mrs Beeton's original recipe, published in 1861, which used allspice, and a later turn-of-the-century version which uses the now accepted English-style mixed spice blend.

Directions



Mix together the flour, sugar, fruit, spice and salt in a large bowl, and make a well in the centre. Mix the yeast into the warm milk and pour into the well. Gently stir the milk with a wooden spoon so that enough of the surrounding flour mixture is gradually introduced into the liquid to thicken it to a batter consistency. That is, don't mix all the flour into the milk – leave the excess flour mixture around the edges.



Place the bowl over a pot of hot (not boiling) water and set aside for 30–40 minutes to allow the yeast mixture to ferment; it will expand in size and look puffy and bubbly at the edges.



Preheat oven to 180°C and line a baking tray with baking paper.

Return the bowl to the workbench and pour the melted butter into the fermented mass. Mix the butter into the wet mass with a wooden spoon, gradually incorporating the remaining flour into the mixture until a soft dough is formed. (If it seems too wet you may need to add an extra dusting of flour; if too dry, a little more milk.)



With floured hands, knead the dough until smooth and elastic. Continuing with floured hands, break or cut portions from the dough and gently form into 12 buns (or more smaller ones).



Place the buns onto the baking tray a little distance apart and allow to them rest near the warmth of the oven for half an hour so that they will swell in size again.

Using a serrated knife, cut a cross into each bun and bake for 30 minutes or until nicely browned and a skewer inserted into the centre comes out clean.



To make the glaze, dissolve the sugar in 2 tablespoons of boiling water, and brush on top of the buns while they are still warm.