

Try This At Home Series

May 26, 2020



Kirby hoping a crumb will fall.

Cinnamon Rolls

Mitch Stamm and Kristen Lopez

Mitch: COVID-19 has altered my sensibilities. I'm craving things that I do not ordinarily eat, much less think about. One craving, cinnamon rolls, is taunting me. For eight weeks, I have been one cinnamon roll away from heaven. Each week becomes more difficult. Particularly perplexing, I prefer morning buns. I haven't thought about them until this moment.

Gaining resourcefulness in proportion to laziness, I broke isolation and went looking. Local bakeries were closed, so I went to the supermarket. I do not remember the last time I scanned a supermarket bakery, much less studied one. I scoured this one. No

cinnamon rolls. Everything for sale appeared to have been made from a mix or to have entered the building as a block of ice. The uniform slices of quick bread looked like they will outlast the pandemic. A particularly orange one looked like it will outlast the plastic.

In the previous normal, I strolled, even sauntered, down the bread aisle assured that I was too highly evolved to pretend to notice the pretenders. Not anymore. Jettisoning arrogance and pride, I navigated to an island of blue and white boxes. I was not unfamiliar with a bakery that begins with Enten and ends with Manns. However, I had never – and still haven't – had their products. And, there I found myself, like a complete unknown, positioning my cart defensively in case the other shopper in the market wanted a cinnamon roll. No cinnamon rolls, but at least the products are priced so you can consume the whole box. Not that I have any experience with that, but it works better if you put everything in a blender. The thought of purchasing a refrigerated can of cinnamon rolls never popped into my mind.

The cinnamon roll craze of the 1980s came on the heels of the oat bran hype. They were so popular that cinnamon roll franchises existed. The shops were contemporary with beautiful tile and neon. The packaging and uniforms were designed by a top advertising firm. Their central premise was marketing, not product based. I remember their products well. A tanning booth would have provided more color. If you stood too close, you could catch a cavity. Their formula was Big + Soft & Sweet + Neon = Yummy. It worked because they sold them by the box, carton, and case.

To compete with them, I chose to bake the rolls, as they did, in a contiguous mass. In lieu of parchment, I generously buttered the sheet tray. When the rolls were baked, I removed them from the oven, placed parchment on top of the rolls so I could invert the tray and replace the buttered pan on the bottom with another buttered tray before turning it right side up. Then I buttered the top surface, brushed it with syrup and glazed it while hot. There were two types of customers. The ones who wanted the rolls from the tray's perimeter and everyone else. There was the special customer who wanted the roll from the center of the tray. My standard reply was that the true center was the confluence of four rolls. Would you like those in a bag or a box?

Another phenomenon of the era was the diner and truck stop plate-sized cinnamon roll. Ten inches of mush served like pancakes with glaze poured over it was a side dish for patrons of this type of establishment. "Cinnamon Dumpling" would have been a more descriptive name. It looked like the mesmerizing oculus of a time travel portal from a 1960's sci-fi flick.

To satisfy my craving, I'm maintaining my standards

The rolls: buns, if you will, must be baked individually. There is not a lot of room for Monsieur Maillard to succeed if buns are baked in a mass. As soft and tender as I like the interior, I like baked surfaces, not the cotton candy that crowding causes.

The filling: Brown sugar, butter, cinnamon, and a little flour to thicken the goo.

The icing; I know some bakers use the glandular secretions of another species to moisten the sugar. All the sugar in Brazil can't overcome the ick factor of said secretion

at room temperature for an unspecified amount of time. To be balanced, a proper glaze includes confectioner's sugar, glucose, water, lemon juice, vanilla, and salt. Applied to hot rolls, it melds to the surface as icing and a sealant.

Is it too much to ask for a roll with a toothsome chew that exploits the flavors and textures of the roll, the filling, and the icing separately and in concert? Seemingly so. Kristen, share your dough and method with us.



Kristen: For the past six years, every memorial day weekend, my husband and I have attended an A'nime Convention in San Jose, CA. Though we have lived in four different towns, it has been one of the few things that helped us feel tied to the Bay Area. One of the ways, it started to feel like our home. Something to look forward to each year, see familiar faces, share common interests with strangers and just plain have fun.

Well, this year, things looked a little different.

Postponed until 2021, I came up with the idea of having our own shelter in place convention. We would binge watch shows that had been on our list for years but also I planned to cook and bake up a Japanese food storm. Including Hokkaido Milk Bread. A dough style I'd been dabbling in recently, especially for cinnamon rolls.

Hokkaido Milk Dough is uber soft and pillowy. I have used the tangzhong method periodically in my career and always find myself being more and more intrigued by the results of the "roux" technique. I am still in the stage where I'm exploring different takes on the formula to find my favorite.

For this home bake, I used the [King Arthur Flour Hokkaido Milk Bun recipe](#). I made cinnamon rolls, as agreed upon for today's subject, as well as a big plain loaf to be turned into several Japanese style sandwiches over the long weekend.

Cinnamon rolls are one of the few foods I identify childhood memories with. Popped from the can every Christmas morning. It's a comfort food of mythical proportions in my family. The fluffier, the better. The more frosting applied, the better. To this day, it is still a part of our family Christmas breakfast buffet. Straight from the tube, next to the bagel platter from my favorite shop that's in a strip mall, next to a nail salon, of course.

When discussing our respective cinnamon roll techniques and opinions on the phone a few days ago, Mitch suggested I add some flour to my cinnamon sugar mixture to help keep the sugar in the roll better. He was right. He's always (often?) right. And we both agreed, absolutely no raisins allowed.

Making the dough in my oversized Biscuits T-shirt pjs, barely through my coffee, it felt like a holiday morning of years past. The kind of morning, where you get up with a mission to make something with tradition and nostalgia. But I was missing something...

Family.

The thing that really makes the place you live, feel like home. And there's no one I'd rather share my cinnamon rolls with than you.

This dough is now my favorite cinnamon roll dough. It's got a stronger butter flavor than other Hokkaido style doughs (in my adventures so far) which, to no one's surprise, made them an excellent canvas for cinnamon sugar. Super fluffy and squishy. Topped with leftover birthday cream cheese frosting, these puppies did not last long.