



HOT CROSS BUNS

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Nations, cultures, and religions include bread as an integral component of religious and secular observances. The breads are typically enriched and may contain dairy, eggs, sweeteners, and inclusions.

Hot cross buns have been synonymous with Easter celebrations since they appeared in 12th century England. Interestingly, hot cross buns pre-date Christianity, with their origins in paganism. Ancient Egyptians used small round breads topped with crosses to celebrate the gods. The cross divided the bread into four equal sections, representing the four phases of the moon and/or the four seasons, depending on the occasion.

Later, Greeks and Romans offered similar sweetened rolls in tribute to Eos, the goddess of the morning, and to Eostre, the goddess of light, who lent her name to the Easter observances. The cross on top symbolized the horns of a sacrificial ox. The English word bun is a derivation of the Greek word for ceremonial cakes and breads, boun.

In the Middle Ages, home bakers marked their loaves with crosses before baking. They believed the cross would ensure a successful bake, warding off the evil spirits that inhibit the bread from rising. This superstition gradually faded, except for marking Good Friday loaves and hot cross buns, only to be replaced by another one. This time the loaves and buns were hung from the ceiling like sausages. It was believed that the bread would never mold

and would provide protection against evil spirits and illness until the following Good Friday when the loaves and buns would be replaced. In the event of illness, a portion of bread could be removed from its string and crushed to a powder, which was incorporated into water for therapeutic effect. During the same period, Jews hung bread and a container of water from the ceiling to ward off cholera. They believed its power was so strong that one loaf in one house would protect the community.

To avoid detection, early Christians celebrated the resurrection of Christ at the same time of year as the pagan Spring celebration. It was in the 12th century that an English monk decorated his freshly baked buns with a cross on Good Friday, also known as the Day of the Cross. The custom gained traction, and over the years, fruits and precious spices were included to represent health and prosperity.

Spiced buns were banned when the English broke ties with the Catholic Church in the 16th century. However, by 1592, Queen Elizabeth I relented and granted permission for commercial bakers to produce the buns for funerals, Christmas, and Easter. Otherwise, they could be baked in homes. The bakers argued that a cross cut into a loaf or bun induced a more pronounced rise in the oven: an axiom then, and an axiom now.

Farmers began to place hot cross buns in their stored grain to distract mice and other pests, much the way shoofly pie

was used by American housewives. By the early 19th century, the Bun House of Chelsea, famous for Chelsea buns, was the largest producer of hot cross buns. It remained so for over a century until the building was demolished.

Once an English specialty, the buns' popularity has become a seasonal staple around the world and is included in Coupe du Monde de la Boulangerie as one of the Breads of the World. 🌟



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PHOTOS: CONNIE COX

A traditional sweet bun, made with dried fruit and a cross piped on top.

HOT CROSS BUNS

TOTAL FORMULA			PREFERMENT		FINAL DOUGH	
Ingredients	%	kilograms	%	kilograms	%	kilograms
Bread flour	100.00	8.828	100.00	6.800	100.00	2.042
Milk	56.41	4.980	60.00	4.072	44.47	0.908
Egg	3.22	0.284			13.91	0.284
Egg yolk	3.22	0.284			13.91	0.284
Salt	0.61	0.054			2.64	0.054
Instant yeast	0.72	0.063	0.40	0.027	1.76	0.036
Dried fruit*	15.42	1.361			66.65	1.361
Butter	6.16	0.544			26.64	0.544
Honey	2.31	0.204			9.99	0.204
Sugar†	2.31	0.204			9.99	0.204
Spice blend‡	0.18	0.016			0.78	0.016
Preferment					533.04	10.885
Totals	190.55	16.822	160.40	10.899	823.79	16.822

*Currants are traditional, variations include: diced apricots, cranberries, crystallized ginger, etc.

†Muscovado or other brown sugar may be substituted

‡Allspice, cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves

PROCESS — SYRUP

- Boil equal parts glucose, sugar, and water. Infuse with used vanilla beans and citrus scraps/trimmings.

PROCESS — PIPING PASTE

Two Variations

- Prepare a thick water icing of glucose, confectioner's sugar, water, lemon juice, and vanilla bean. The paste should be thick enough to remain cylindrical after piping with a plain tip. If it doesn't hurt to pipe, it's not thick enough.
- Prepare a paste of unsalted butter, powdered sugar, and vanilla bean. Thin, if needed, with simple syrup.

Apply Paste

- Hold the piping bag an inch or two above the buns when piping so the paste flows freely over the bun's contours.

PROCESS — Hot Cross Buns

Preferment

Mix	Type of mixer	Hand or planetary with dough hook
	Length of time	Until a smooth ball
	Dough temperature	70°F

Ferment	Time/temperature	12:00–16:00 at 75°F
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Final Dough

Mix	Hold back	Sugar, butter, dried fruit
	1 st speed	Until incorporated
	2 nd speed	Mix to full development, gradually add sugar and butter in increments
	Add	Dried fruit
	1 st speed	Until incorporated
	Dough temperature	80°F

Ferment	Length of time	2:00
	Fold	1:00

Shape	Divide	60 g
	Shape	Round

Proof	Proofing device	Place in even rows on parchment-lined sheet trays
	Time/temperature	75–80% humidity, 1:30 at 80°F until sides of buns begin to touch at their widest points

Bake	Egg wash	Before baking
	Oven type	Convection
	Time/temperature	350°F, until golden brown
	Finish	Brush with syrup while still hot
	Cool	Pipe on crosses when buns are room temp