

## **Hot Cross Buns**

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Growing up in my house, holidays were a big deal. Although our immediate family was small, we had a longstanding tradition of "taking in strays" and each holiday was a mix of extended family and friends who knew they always had a place at our table.

This all changed in the late 1990s, when my father became ill and was placed in a long-term care facility. When illness strikes your family, you realize that the time you have left together is precious, so our plans around the holidays became centered on finding ways to include my father. Often, this meant loading up the car and cooking makeshift holiday dinners at his care facility – an end to past celebrations at home.

While the location changed, our open door policy didn't. Soon, our holiday festivities included other care facility residents and their families, among whom my mother found an incredibly supportive group of people who became her lifeline during a difficult time. Although my father passed away in 2005 and others in the group have since lost loved ones, they remain closely connected – what they have shared will bond them for life.

One of the ladies in the group would often make the most delicious hot cross buns that to this day, are the best comfort food I've known. She would always claim that she made so much that she had no choice but to share – which pretty much sums up the spirit of their group. I encourage you to do the same.

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### **Hot Cross Buns**

- 1 envelope (1/4-ounce) dry yeast
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1 1/2 cups warm milk (about 110 degrees F.)
- 1 stick of butter, melted
- 1 egg
- 1/2 cup of raisins (I usually do 1/4 cup raisins and 1/4 cup mixed candied fruit)
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
- 3 1/2 cups bleached all-purpose flour
- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
- 1 large egg, beaten
- 1 cup powdered sugar
- 3 tablespoons milk

Combine the yeast, sugar and milk in the bowl of an electric mixer fitted with a dough hook. Beat on low speed for 1 minute. Add the butter, egg and raisins. Mix for 1 minute. Add the salt, cinnamon, nutmeg and flour. Beat on low speed until all of the flour is incorporated, about 1 minute. Then, beat at medium speed until the mixture forms a ball, leaves the sides of the bowl, and climbs up the dough hook. Remove the dough from the bowl.

Using your hands, form the dough into a smooth ball. Lightly oil a large bowl. Place the dough in the bowl and turn it to oil all sides. Cover with plastic wrap and set-aside in a warm, draft-free place until it doubles in size, about 1 hour.

Preheat the oven to 350 degrees. Remove the dough from the bowl and invert it onto a lightly floured surface. Pat the dough into a rectangle about 3/4-inch thick. Roll up the dough, beginning with the long side and stopping after each full turn to press the edge of the roll firmly into the flat sheet of the dough to seal. Press with your fingertips. Tuck and roll so that any seams disappear into the dough. Cut the dough into 1-inch pieces.

Roll each piece of dough into a smooth, round ball. Line a baking sheet with parchment or waxed paper. Place the rolls on the baking sheet, 1/2-inch apart. With a pastry brush, brush the beaten egg evenly over the bread. Cover with plastic wrap and set-aside in a warm, draft-free place until it doubles in size, about 1 hour. Bake until lightly brown, 30 to 35 minutes.

Remove from the oven and cool slightly on a rack. In a mixing bowl, combine the powdered sugar and milk. Mix until smooth. Ice each bun with the frosting in the shape of a cross. Serve warm.

By: Leisa Nichol

