

Hot Cross Buns

Learn how to make perfect hot cross buns using this deliciously spiced yeast dough. Brown sugar, raisins or currants, butter, and vanilla add exceptional flavor and each bun is marked with a traditional cross. Orange icing is the best finishing touch to this classic Easter recipe!

- **Many other recipes can be used- find your favorite**
- For a yeast-free recipe (hard to find during the pandemic)
<https://www.skinnytaste.com/hot-cross-buns/>

What are Hot Cross Buns?

A nursery rhyme, of course! And the first song we usually learn on the recorder. (Is the tune forever and firmly planted in your mind, too?!)

But what are the hot cross buns we eat?! Hot cross buns are rich with history, dating back [to the 12th century](#). They're yeasted sweet buns filled with spices and various fruits such as currants, raisins, and/or candied citrus. They're decorated with a white cross, either marked right into the dough or etched on top with icing. Hot cross buns are a traditional Easter food, typically eaten on Good Friday, but are now widely enjoyed year-long.

You'll love these hot cross buns if you enjoy:

- sweet orange icing
- raisins
- cinnamon spices
- brown sugar
- buttery bread

How to Make Hot Cross Buns

Hot cross buns require basic baking ingredients like flour, yeast, butter, eggs, sugar, and milk. Less milk, more butter and more eggs produces a slightly denser roll (but not heavy!) compared to the dinner rolls. These are more of a dessert/breakfast roll.

Here are the basic steps:

- 1. Make the bread dough.**
- 2. Knead the dough for 2 minutes.**
- 3. Cover the dough and let it rise.** The dough rises in about 1-2 hours.
- 4. Punch down the dough to release the air, then shape into rolls.**
- 5. Let the rolls rise for about 1 hour.**
- 6. Pipe the crosses on top.**
- 7. Bake for 20-25 minutes until golden brown.**
- 8. Top with orange icing.**

Tips:

For extra plump and moist raisins, soak them in hot water for 5-10 minutes. You can also use dried cranberries, too.

The dough comes together easiest with a mixer, but you can make the dough by hand if you don't have one. After the dough comes together in the mixing bowl, knead it for 2 minutes. You can simply continue beating the dough with the mixer for this step or you can knead the dough by hand.

After the dough rises in the bowl, punch it down to release the air. Divide into 15 portions, then roll into balls. Take a piece and stretch the top of the dough while pinching and sealing the bottom. Make sure the rolls are smooth on top and sealed on the bottom.

Cover the shaped rolls, then let them rise for 1 more hour.

Crosses on Hot Cross Buns

There's a couple ways to make crosses on hot cross buns:

1. **Flour Cross:** Pipe a "paste" of flour and water on top of each bun BEFORE baking. This is the most traditional application of the cross and the method I usually choose. It gets a *little* hard after baking, but it's still perfectly chewy.
2. **Icing Cross:** Pipe a thick cross made from icing on each bun AFTER baking.

Use a piping bag– no piping tip needed– or a zipped-top bag. Snip the corner off. If making the flour cross, make sure the corner opening is small because you want a thin line.

Orange Icing

The lush orange icing is the best finishing touch and it's even better if you brush it on the buns right out of the oven.

I would call this an intermediate recipe since there's a few extra steps with 2 rises and piping the crosses on top. However, don't let that stop you from trying hot cross buns!

Happy Easter!

Recipe:

Ingredients

- 3/4 cup (180ml) whole milk, warmed to about 110°F
- 2 and 1/4 teaspoons active dry yeast or instant yeast (*1 standard packet*)
- 1 teaspoon granulated sugar
- 1/2 cup (100g) packed light or dark brown sugar
- 5 Tablespoons (70g) unsalted butter, softened to **room temperature** and cut into 5 pieces
- 1/2 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- 2 large eggs, at room temperature
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 and 1/4 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon ground allspice
- 3 and 1/2 cups (435g) all-purpose flour or bread flour (**spoon & leveled**)*
- 1 cup (140g) raisins or currants*

Flour Cross

1/2 cup (60g) all-purpose flour or bread flour

6–8 Tablespoons (90-120ml) water

Orange Icing

1 cup (120g) confectioners' sugar

3 Tablespoons (45ml) fresh or bottled orange juice (*or use milk and a splash of vanilla extract for plain icing*)

Instructions

- **Prepare the dough: Whisk the warm milk, yeast, and 1 teaspoon of granulated sugar together in the bowl of your stand mixer fitted with a dough hook or paddle attachment. Cover and allow to sit for 5 minutes.**
- **Add the brown sugar, butter, vanilla extract, eggs, salt, cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, and 1 cup (125g) flour. Beat on low speed for 30 seconds, scrape down the sides of the bowl with a rubber spatula, then add the remaining flour and the raisins. Beat on medium speed until the dough comes together and pulls away from the sides of the bowl, about 2 minutes. Dough should be a little sticky and soft. If it's too sticky and not pulling away**

from the sides of the bowl, mix in additional flour 1 Tablespoon at a time. **If you do not own a mixer, you can mix this dough with a large wooden spoon or rubber spatula. It will take a bit of arm muscle!**

- **Knead the dough:** Keep the dough in the mixer and beat for an additional 2 minutes or knead by hand on a lightly floured surface for 2 minutes.
- **1st Rise:** Lightly grease a large bowl with oil or nonstick spray. Place the dough in the bowl, turning it to coat all sides in the oil. Cover the bowl with aluminum foil, plastic wrap, or a clean kitchen towel. Allow the dough to rise in a relatively warm environment for 1-2 hours or until double in size. (I always let it rise on the counter. Takes about 2 hours. For a tiny reduction in rise time, see my answer to *Where Should Dough Rise?* in my [Baking with Yeast Guide](#).)
- **Grease a 9×13 inch baking pan** or two 9-inch square or round baking pans. You can also bake the rolls in a cast iron skillet or on a lined baking sheet.
- **Shape the rolls:** When the dough is ready, punch it down to release the air. Divide the dough into 14-16 equal pieces. (Just eyeball it– doesn't need to be perfect!) Shape each piece into a smooth ball, pinching it on the bottom to seal. I do this entirely in my hands and you can watch in the [video tutorial](#) for my dinner rolls. Arrange in prepared baking pan.
- **2nd Rise:** Cover shaped rolls with aluminum foil, plastic wrap, or a clean kitchen towel. Allow to rise until puffy, about 1 hour.
- **Preheat oven to 350°F (177°C).**
- **Add the cross:** Whisk the cross ingredients together, starting with 6 Tablespoons of water. You want a thick paste that will pipe easily. Add remaining water if needed. Spoon paste into a

icing piping bag or zipped-top bag. (No need to use a piping tip if using a piping bag.) Snip off a small piece at the corner. Pipe a line down the center of each row of buns, then repeat in the other direction to create crosses.

- **Bake the rolls:** Bake for 20-25 minutes or until golden brown on top, rotating the pan halfway through. If you notice the tops browning too quickly, loosely tent the pan with aluminum foil. Remove from the oven and allow rolls to cool for a few minutes as you prepare the icing.
- **Make the icing:** Whisk the icing ingredients together, then drizzle or brush on warm rolls. Serve immediately.
- **Cover leftover rolls tightly and store at room temperature for 1-2 days or in the refrigerator for up to 1 week.**

Notes

Freezing Instructions: Prepare recipe through step 6. Place shaped buns in a greased baking pan, cover tightly, and freeze for up to 3 months. Once frozen, the dough balls won't stick together anymore and you can place them in a freezer bag if needed. On the day you serve them, arrange the dough balls in a greased baking pan, cover tightly, then let them thaw and rise for about 4-5 hours. Continue with step 8. You can also freeze the baked hot cross buns. Allow them to cool completely, then freeze without icing for up to 3 months. Thaw in the refrigerator or at room temperature, then reheat as desired and add icing.

Overnight Instructions: Prepare the recipe through step 6. Cover the shaped buns tightly and refrigerate for up to about 15 hours. At least 3 hours before you need them the next day, remove the buns from the refrigerator, keep covered, and allow to rise on the counter for about 1-2 hours before baking. Alternatively, you can let the dough have its 1st rise

in the refrigerator overnight. Cover the dough tightly and place in the refrigerator for up to 12 hours. Remove from the refrigerator and allow the dough to fully rise for 2 more hours. Continue with step 5.

Optional Add-Ins: Instead of (or in addition to) raisins, try using dried cranberries, chopped pecans or walnuts, chopped candied citrus, or chopped dried apricots. Keep total add ins to about 1 and 3/4 cups total. Feel free to add the zest from 1 lemon or orange to the dough when you add the butter. Add 1/4 teaspoon ground cloves or cardamom, if desired. Feel free to adjust the spices to your liking. You can plump up the raisins, currants, or dried cranberries if desired. Soak in hot water for 5-10 minutes, drain, then pat dry before adding to dough.

Yeast: Use instant yeast or active dry yeast. Rise times will be slightly longer using active dry yeast. Reference my [Baking with Yeast Guide](#) for answers to common yeast FAQs.

Flour: You can use all-purpose flour or bread flour. All-purpose flour is convenient for most, but bread flour produces chewier hot cross buns. The rolls are still soft no matter which you use. Either flour is fine and there are no other changes to the recipe if you use one or the other.

Icing Cross: If you prefer to make a cross from icing and pipe it onto the buns after baking, skip step 9. Use the orange icing recipe and reduce orange juice to 1 Tablespoon to yield a very thick icing. Replace with milk and add a splash of vanilla extract, if desired.