



Sticky Buns

From *America's Test Kitchen* Season 17: The Ultimate Sticky Buns

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS:

Many recipes for sticky buns call for a firm, dry dough that's easy to manipulate into the required spiral, simple to slice, and sturdy enough to support a generous amount of topping. But firm, dry sticky buns aren't very appealing.

To make a softer, more tender, and moist sticky bun, we added a cooked flour-and-water paste to the dough. The paste traps water, so the dough isn't sticky or difficult to work with, and the increased hydration converts to steam during baking, which makes the bread fluffy and light. The added water also keeps the crumb moist and tender. To ensure that the soft bread wouldn't collapse under the weight of the topping, we strengthened the crumb by adding a resting period and withholding the sugar and salt until the gluten was firmly established.

Dark corn syrup plus water was the key to a topping that was substantial enough to sit atop the buns without sinking in but not so firm that it presented a danger to our teeth.

Makes 12 buns

These buns take about 4 hours to make from start to finish. For dough that is easy to work with and produces light, fluffy buns, we strongly recommend that you measure the flour for the dough by weight. The slight tackiness of the dough aids in flattening and stretching it in step 6, so resist the urge to use a lot of dusting flour. Rolling the dough cylinder tightly in step 7 will result in misshapen rolls; keep the cylinder a bit slack. Bake these buns in a metal, not glass or ceramic, baking pan. We like dark corn syrup and pecans here, but light corn syrup may be used, and the nuts may be omitted, if desired.

INGREDIENTS

Flour Paste

2/3 cup water

1/4 cup (1 1/3 ounces) bread flour

Dough

2/3 cup milk

1 large egg plus 1 large yolk

2 3/4 cups (15 1/8 ounces) bread flour

2 teaspoons instant or rapid-rise yeast

3 tablespoons granulated sugar

1 1/2 teaspoons salt

6 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened

Topping

6 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

1/2 cup packed (3 1/2 ounces) dark brown sugar

1/4 cup (1 3/4 ounces) granulated sugar

1/4 cup packed light brown sugar

1 cup pecans, toasted and chopped (optional)

Filling

3/4 cup packed (5 1/4 ounces) dark brown sugar

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

INSTRUCTIONS

1. FOR THE FLOUR PASTE: Whisk water and flour together in small bowl until no lumps remain. Microwave, whisking every 25 seconds, until mixture thickens to stiff, smooth, pudding-like consistency that forms mound when dropped from end of whisk into bowl, 50 to 75 seconds.

2. FOR THE DOUGH: In bowl of stand mixer, whisk flour paste and milk together until smooth. Add egg and yolk and whisk until incorporated. Add flour and yeast. Fit stand mixer with dough hook and mix on low speed until all flour is moistened, 1 to 2 minutes. Let stand for 15 minutes. Add sugar and salt and mix on medium-low speed for 5 minutes. Stop mixer and add butter. Continue to mix on medium-low speed for 5 minutes longer, scraping down dough hook and sides of bowl halfway through (dough will stick to bottom of bowl).

3. Transfer dough to lightly floured counter. Knead briefly to form ball and transfer seam side down to lightly greased bowl; lightly coat surface of dough with vegetable oil spray and cover bowl with plastic wrap. Let dough rise until just doubled in volume, 40 minutes to 1 hour.

4. FOR THE TOPPING: While dough rises, grease 13 by 9-inch metal baking pan. Whisk melted butter, brown sugar, granulated sugar, corn syrup, and salt together in medium bowl until smooth. Add water and whisk until incorporated. Pour mixture into prepared pan and tilt pan to cover bottom. Sprinkle evenly with pecans, if using.

5. FOR THE FILLING: Combine sugar and cinnamon in small bowl and mix until thoroughly combined; set aside.

6. Turn out dough onto lightly floured counter. Press dough gently but firmly to expel air. Working from center toward edge, pat and stretch dough to form 18 by 15-inch rectangle with long edge nearest you. Sprinkle filling over dough, leaving 1-inch border along top edge; smooth filling into even layer with your hand, then gently press mixture into dough to adhere.

7. Beginning with long edge nearest you, roll dough into cylinder, taking care not to roll too tightly. Pinch seam to seal and roll cylinder seam side down. Mark gently with knife to create 12 equal portions. To slice, hold strand of dental floss taut and slide underneath cylinder, stopping at first mark. Cross ends of floss over each other and pull. Slice cylinder into 12 portions and transfer, cut sides down, to prepared baking pan. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and let rise until buns are puffy and touching one another, 40 minutes to 1 hour. (Buns may be refrigerated immediately after shaping for up to 14 hours. To bake, remove baking pan from refrigerator and let sit until buns are puffy and touching one another, 1 to 1 1/2 hours.) Meanwhile, adjust oven racks to lowest and lower-middle positions. Place rimmed baking sheet on lower rack to catch any drips and heat oven to 375 degrees.

8. Bake buns on upper rack until golden brown, about 20 minutes. Tent with aluminum foil and bake until center of dough registers at least 200 degrees, 10 to 15 minutes longer. Let buns cool in pan on wire rack for 5 minutes. Place rimmed baking sheet over buns and carefully invert. Remove pan and let buns cool for 5 minutes. Using spoon, scoop any glaze on baking sheet onto buns. Let cool for at least 10 minutes longer before serving.

TECHNIQUE

THE ROAD TO MOIST STICKY BUNS

Our ideal was a light, moist bun that wasn't too rich or sweet, so we could eat the whole thing without regret. Here's how we got there.

TEST 1: BASIC YEASTED DOUGH

Why We Tried It: Most are not too sticky, which makes them easy to work with.



Result: Buns were dense and dry.

TEST 2: REPLACE SOME FLOUR WITH ROLLED OATS

Why We Tried It: We hoped the oats would help retain moisture and soften the buns.

Result: No improvement.



TEST 3: ADD MASHED POTATOES

Why We Tried It: Instant mashed potatoes also have moisture retaining properties for the promise of a softer bun.

Result: No improvement.



TEST 4: ADD EGGS AND BUTTER

Why We Tried It: Eggs and butter add fat; eggs also add water.

Result: Buns were tender but too rich; dough was overly sticky.



TEST 5: ADD A COOKED FLOUR-AND-WATER PASTE

Why We Tried It: Also known as *tangzhong*, this technique allowed us to add more water without making the dough too wet.

Result: Buns were light and moist; dough was simple to roll and cut.

TECHNIQUE

USE THE CORRECT PAN

If a recipe specifies a particular pan—metal or glass—don't be tempted to swap one for the other. Each material conducts heat at a different rate, and baking for more or less time to account for that difference won't give you identical results. Case in point: Our Sticky Buns recipe calls for a metal baking pan. When we tried baking the buns in a glass baking dish, which conducts heat more slowly than a metal pan, we had to extend the baking time by 10 minutes to ensure that the buns in the center of the dish were done. But since glass retains heat longer than metal, the buns on the edges of the dish turned dry and hard. For best results, stick with the pan the recipe calls for.