

Sticky Buns (Overnight)

Source: *Cook's Illustrated*

Yield: 12 sticky buns

In developing our sticky buns recipe, we tested a series of ingredients and settled on a buttermilk base that left the buns' flavor and texture rich but not heavy and the crumb tender and light. Six tablespoons of melted butter and three eggs later, the dough was sweet and moist with substantial chew. For a spiced sweet and assertive filling, we used brown rather than granulated sugar because of its superior texture and deep color. Crowned with a toasted pecan topping—butter, light brown sugar, corn syrup, and toasted, chopped pecans—the sticky buns achieved greatness.

Ingredients

Dough

3 large eggs at room temperature
¼ cup granulated sugar
¾ cup buttermilk at room temperature
1¼ teaspoons table salt
2¼ teaspoons instant yeast
4¼ (21¼ oz) cups unbleached all-purpose flour, plus more for dusting
6 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and cooled until warm

Caramel Glaze

6 tablespoons unsalted butter
¾ cup (5¼ oz) packed light brown sugar
3 tablespoons corn syrup, light or dark
2 tablespoons heavy cream
1 pinch table salt

Cinnamon-Sugar Filling

¾ cup (5¼ oz) packed light brown sugar
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
¼ teaspoon ground cloves
1 pinch table salt
1 tablespoon unsalted butter, melted

Pecan Topping

3 tablespoons unsalted butter
¼ cup (1¾ oz) packed light brown sugar
3 tablespoons corn syrup, light or dark
pinch table salt
1 teaspoon vanilla extract
¾ cup pecans (3 oz), toasted in a skillet over medium heat until fragrant and browned, about 5

minutes, then cooled and coarsely chopped

Instructions

If you like, sticky buns can be made and shaped the night before and then refrigerated. The next morning, set the baking dish in a warm-water bath to speed the dough's rise. This recipe has four components: the dough that is shaped into buns, the filling that creates the swirl in the shaped buns, the caramel glaze that bakes in the bottom of the baking dish along with the buns, and the pecan topping that garnishes the buns once baked. Although the ingredient list may look long, note that many ingredients are repeated. Leftover sticky buns can be wrapped in foil or plastic wrap and refrigerated for up to 3 days, but they should be warmed through before serving. They reheat quickly in a microwave oven (for 2 buns, about 2 minutes at 50 percent power works well); they can also be put into a 325-degree oven for about 8 minutes.

Previous Night (~3.5 Hours)

For the dough: In bowl of standing mixer, whisk eggs to combine; add buttermilk and whisk to combine. Whisk in sugar, salt, and yeast. Add about 2 cups flour and butter; stir with wooden spoon or rubber spatula until evenly moistened and combined. Add all but about 1/4 cup remaining flour and knead with dough hook at low speed 5 minutes. Check consistency of dough (dough should feel soft and moist but should not be wet and sticky; add more flour, if necessary); knead at low speed 5 minutes longer (dough should clear sides of bowl but stick to bottom). Turn dough out onto lightly floured work surface; knead by hand about 1 minute to ensure that dough is uniform (dough should not stick to work surface during hand kneading; if it does stick, knead in additional flour 1 tablespoon at a time).

Lightly spray large bowl or plastic container with nonstick cooking spray. Transfer dough to bowl, spray dough lightly with cooking spray, then cover bowl tightly with plastic wrap and set in warm, draftfree spot until doubled in volume, 2 to 2 1/2 hours.

For the glaze: Meanwhile, combine all ingredients for glaze in small saucepan; cook over medium heat, whisking occasionally, until butter is melted and mixture is thoroughly combined. Pour mixture into nonstick metal 13- by 9-inch baking dish; using rubber spatula, spread mixture to cover surface of baking dish. Set baking dish aside.

To assemble buns: For filling, combine brown sugar, cinnamon, cloves, and salt in small bowl and mix until thoroughly combined, using fingers to break up sugar lumps; set aside. Turn dough out onto lightly floured work surface. Gently shape dough into rough rectangle with long side nearest you. Lightly flour dough and roll to 16- by 12-inch rectangle. Brush dough with 1 tablespoon melted butter, leaving 1/2-inch border along top edge; with butter remaining on brush, brush sides of baking dish. Sprinkle filling mixture over dough, leaving 3/4-inch border along top edge; smooth filling in even layer with hand, then gently press mixture into dough to adhere. Beginning with long edge nearest you, roll dough into taut cylinder. Firmly pinch seam to seal and roll cylinder seam-side down. Very gently stretch to cylinder of even diameter and 18-inch length; push ends in to create even thickness. Using serrated knife and gentle sawing motion, slice cylinder in half, then slice each half in half again to create evenly sized quarters. Slice each quarter evenly into thirds, yielding 12 buns (end pieces may be slightly smaller).

Arrange buns cut-side down in prepared baking dish; cover tightly with plastic wrap and refrigerate

10 to 14 hours.

Morning (~2.5 Hours)

To prepare buns: Place baking pan in warm-water bath (about 120 degrees) in kitchen sink or large roasting pan for 20 minutes. Remove from water bath and let stand at room temperature until buns look slightly puffy and are pressed against one another, about 1 1/2 hours. About an hour before baking, adjust oven rack to lowest position, place pizza stone on rack (if using), and heat oven to 350 degrees.

To bake buns: Place baking pan on pizza stone; bake until golden brown and center of dough registers about 180 degrees on instant-read thermometer, 25 to 30 minutes. Cool on wire rack 10 minutes; invert onto rimmed baking sheet, large rectangular platter, or cutting board. With rubber spatula, scrape any glaze remaining in baking pan onto buns; let cool while making pecan topping.

For the topping: Combine butter, brown sugar, corn syrup, and salt in small saucepan and bring to simmer over medium heat, whisking occasionally to thoroughly combine. Off heat, stir in vanilla and pecans until pecans are evenly coated. Using soup spoon, spoon heaping tablespoon nuts and topping over center of each sticky bun. Continue to cool until sticky buns are warm, 15 to 20 minutes. Pull apart or use serrated knife to cut apart sticky buns; serve.

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