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This image released by Milk Street shows a recipe for hot cross buns studded with bourbon-plumped currants. (Milk Street via AP)

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Hot cross buns are an Easter specialty with a light, enriched crumb that's studded with currants and flavored with a gentle mix of warm spices and a hint of citrus. While some versions are drizzled with icing, we prefer a traditional semi-sweet, flour-based "cross" etched across the top.

This recipe from our book *Milk Street Bakes* mostly sticks to tradition but amps up the flavor. We enrich the dough with tangy buttermilk instead of regular milk, along with orange zest and a little Lyle's Golden Syrup for its bittersweet caramel notes. Lyle's Golden Syrup is an amber-hued sweetener common to the U.K.; mild clover honey works equally well if you can't find the iconic green can of syrup.

We plump the currants in bourbon, which enhances the flavors in the spice mix, then use the currant-flavored bourbon to make a shiny glaze.



The work is spread over a couple days so the buns can be baked and served for breakfast or brunch. If you wish to bake the buns the same day, after shaping them, let them rise at room temperature until just shy of doubled, about an hour. Halfway into rising, heat the oven and prepare the egg wash and piping mixture. Once doubled, brush the buns with egg wash and pipe on the crosses, then bake and glaze as directed. Store extra buns in an airtight container for up to three days; rewarm wrapped in foil in a 300°F oven for 10 to 15 minutes.

Don't heat the buttermilk to bring it to room temperature. Buttermilk curdles easily; it's best to let it stand at room temperature. And don't forget to pat the currants dry after draining their soaking liquid. Additional moisture can make the rather sticky

dough difficult to handle when shaping.

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Hot Cross Buns

Start to finish: 13 hours (1¼ hours active), plus cooling

Makes 12 buns

Ingredients:

For the dough:

93 grams ($\frac{2}{3}$ cup) dried currants

$\frac{1}{3}$ cup bourbon

1 cup buttermilk, room temperature

1 large egg, plus 1 large egg yolk

3 tablespoons Lyle's Golden Syrup (see headnote) or honey

1 tablespoon grated orange zest

411 grams (3 cups) bread flour, plus more for dusting

2¼ teaspoons instant yeast

$\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon table salt

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground cinnamon

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground allspice

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon freshly grated nutmeg

57 grams (4 tablespoons) salted butter, cut into 4 pieces, room temperature

For the egg wash and piping mixture:

1 large egg

34 grams ($\frac{1}{4}$ cup) bread flour

For the glaze:

Bourbon, as needed

2 tablespoons Lyle's Golden Syrup or honey

Instructions:

To make the dough, in a small microwave-safe bowl, stir the currants and bourbon. Microwave, uncovered, on high until warm, about 30 seconds, stirring once. Stir again, then set aside until plump, about 15 minutes. Drain in a fine-mesh strainer set over a small bowl; reserve the liquid. Turn the currants onto a paper towel-lined plate and pat dry; set aside.

In a 2-cup liquid measuring cup or small bowl, whisk the buttermilk, whole egg, egg yolk, golden syrup and orange zest. In a stand mixer with the dough hook, mix the flour, yeast, salt, cinnamon, allspice and nutmeg on low until combined, about 20 seconds. With the mixer running, add the buttermilk mixture; mix until a shaggy dough forms, about 45 seconds. Increase to medium-low and knead until sticky and elastic, 8 to 10 minutes; if the dough climbs up the hook, occasionally push it off.

With the mixer running on medium-low, add the butter 1 piece at a time, mixing until almost fully incorporated, about 30 seconds; scrape the bowl as needed. Knead on medium-low until shiny and once again elastic, 3 to 5 minutes. Scrape the dough off the hook. With the mixer running on medium-low, add the currants in 2 batches. Knead until distributed throughout the dough, 1 to 2 minutes. Detach the bowl from the mixer and use a silicone spatula to scrape the bowl and gather the dough at the center. Cover with plastic wrap and let rise at room temperature until doubled, 1 to 1½ hours.

Meanwhile, mist a 9-by-13-inch baking pan or baking dish with cooking spray. Line the pan with a 12-by-16-inch piece of parchment positioned so the excess overhangs the pan's long sides. Mist the parchment with cooking spray; set aside.

When the dough has doubled, lightly flour the counter and turn the dough out onto it. Divide into 12 portions, each about 77 grams (2½ ounces). Form each into a taut ball by rolling it against the counter in a circular motion under a cupped hand. Place seam-side down in the prepared pan, arranging them in 3 rows of 4. Mist a sheet of plastic wrap with cooking spray and drape over the pan, then cover loosely with a kitchen towel. Refrigerate for at least 8 hours or up to 24 hours.

About 2 hours before you are ready to bake, remove the buns from the refrigerator. Let stand at room temperature, covered, until almost doubled, 1½ to 2 hours.

About 1 hour into rising, in a small bowl, beat the egg for the wash until well combined; set aside. In another small bowl, combine the flour and 2½ tablespoons water; whisk until smooth. The mixture should form a thick paste that falls slowly

from the whisk and mounds on itself in the bowl; if too thick, whisk in more water a few drops at a time. Transfer to a quart-size, zip-close bag. Press out the air and push the mixture to one corner; twist the bag to keep the batter contained in the corner; set aside. Heat the oven to 350°F with a rack in the middle position.

When the buns have doubled, brush them with egg wash (you will not need to use all of the egg). With the piping mixture still pushed to the corner of the bag, use scissors to snip off $\frac{1}{8}$ to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch from the tip of the bag. Pipe a continuous line across the center of each row of buns, then pipe a continuous line down the center of each column of buns, creating a cross on the center of each bun. Bake until the buns are deep golden brown, 30 to 35 minutes.

Meanwhile, make the glaze. Measure the bourbon reserved from soaking the currants, then supplement with additional bourbon to total 3 tablespoons. In a small saucepan, combine the bourbon and syrup. Simmer over medium, stirring, until lightly syrupy and reduced to about 3 tablespoons, about 2 minutes; set aside off heat.

When the buns are done, set the pan on a wire rack and immediately brush with the glaze. Cool for 10 minutes. Using the parchment sling, lift the buns from the pan and set directly on the rack. Serve warm or at room temperature.

This story appears in the **Our Daily Bread** feature series. [View the full series.](#)