

Bake a batch of hot cross biscuits

Family fun at Easter time can include more than coloring bunnies. Baking together offers a double bonus: quality time with your children and delicious results the whole family will enjoy eating.

There's even a history lesson to be learned when you select a traditional recipe with a contemporary twist. Hot cross buns, a not-too-sweet yeast roll flavored with currants and topped with icing in the shape of a cross, is an English bread that predates Christianity. These buns first were baked to honor the Goddess of Spring. Later, when the Christian faith came to England, bakers altered a cross on the tops of the buns, and the buns became associated with Good Friday.

Because they rely on yeast to make them rise, traditional hot cross buns require both the time and heat. Hot Cross Biscuits, on the other hand, are much quicker and easier to make.

A biscuit at its most basic requires just five ingredients: flour, baking powder, salt, shortening or butter and milk. Because they use baking powder instead of yeast for leavening, biscuits are sometimes referred to as "quick breads."

Some biscuit recipes call for buttermilk and baking soda; others use grains such as oats in place of some of the flour. Many biscuit variations include additional ingredients such as dried or fresh fruit, nuts, spices, even chocolate chips. And not all biscuits are sweet. Cheese, herbs, olives, shredded carrots, sun-dried tomatoes, diced ham, chilies and other savory ingredients are also found in biscuit recipes.

So how should a biscuit look

and taste? According to Karen Doherty, a manager in the Quaker Kitchens, a perfect biscuit is light and tender with a golden brown crust and straight, even sides. When baking hot cross biscuits, or any other biscuit, Doherty has these tips:

- Combine dry ingredients thoroughly to evenly distribute the baking powder.
- When substituting oats for part of the flour, either quick or old fashioned oats can be used. Biscuits made with old fashioned oats will have a heartier texture and whole-grain flavor. Oats may be substituted for up to one-third of the flour in recipes for biscuits, muffins and other breads.
- For the flakiest biscuits, use chilled butter, margarine or shortening and a pastry blender, two knives or your fingertips to combine the fat with the dry ingredients. The mixture should look like coarse crumbs.
- Add milk all at once and stir just until the dry ingredients are moistened and the dough clumps together.
- Knead dough quickly and gently 6 to 8 times on a lightly floured surface just until no longer sticky. Too much flour and overkneading the dough will make biscuits tough.
- Roll or pat dough to an even thickness, usually 1/2 inch.
- Cut biscuits with a floured biscuit cutter and a straight downward motion.
- Avoid twisting the biscuit cutter or biscuits may rise unevenly.
- Brush tops of biscuits with milk, melted butter or margarine before baking for richer brown tops. If desired, sprinkle with ad-



QUAKER OATS

Quick biscuits: Hot Cross Biscuits are a terrific baking activity to do with children. These light and tender biscuits are reminiscent of the traditional Easter hot cross buns.

ditional oats.
■ Bake biscuits in a preheated hot (425-450° F.) oven until light golden brown, and serve hot.

HOT CROSS BISCUITS

- 1 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 cup Quaker oats (quick or old fashioned, uncooked)
- 2 tablespoons firmly packed brown sugar
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- 1 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/4 teaspoon salt (optional)
- 1/2 cup (5 tablespoons plus 1 teaspoon) margarine or butter, chilled
- 1/4 cup dried currants or raisins
- 1 teaspoon grated orange peel
- 3/4 cup buttermilk
- 1 tablespoon margarine or butter, melted
- 2 tablespoons Quaker oats (quick or old fashioned, uncooked)
- 1/2 cup powdered sugar
- 1 to 2 teaspoons buttermilk

Heat oven to 450 degrees F. Lightly grease cookie sheet. In large bowl, combine first 7 ingredients; mix well. Cut in margarine with pastry blender or 2 knives until crumbly. Stir in currants and orange peel. Add buttermilk, mixing just until moistened. Turn out onto lightly floured surface; knead gently 6 to 8 times.

Roll or pat dough to 1/2-inch thickness. Cut with floured 2 1/2-inch biscuit cutter. Gather dough scraps together (do not knead); reroll and cut until all dough is used. Place on prepared cookie sheet. Brush tops with melted margarine and sprinkle with remaining oats. Bake 10 to 12 minutes or until light golden brown. Remove to wire rack; cool 3 minutes.

For icing, combine powdered sugar and buttermilk; mix well. Using a small spoon, drizzle icing on each biscuit in the shape of a cross. Serve warm. Yield: 1 dozen.

Nutrition information: 1 biscuit — calories 190, calories from fat 63, total fat 7g, saturated fat 1g, cholesterol 1mg, carbohydrate 28g, dietary fiber 1g, sodium 220 mg, protein 4g.

Economize with best ever meatloaf

AP — Around April 15, our thoughts are likely to turn to economizing. One easy way to "trim" the budget is at the grocery store. These tips can help:

- Purchase seasonal produce.
- If you have space in your pantry, refrigerator and freezer for storage, stock up on often-used items when they're on special.
- Use cents-off coupons and plan your menu around store specials.
- Put together a collection of economy-minded recipes. Experiment with inexpensive spices, seasoning and herbs as a way to add flavor and pizzazz.

BEST EVER MEATLOAF

1 1/2 pounds lean ground beef

- 3/4 cup soft bread crumbs
- 1/2 cup chili sauce
- 1 egg
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- Light Mushroom Gravy (recipe below)
- 2 cups hot mashed potatoes

Heat oven to 350 degrees F. In a large bowl, combine ground beef, bread crumbs, chili sauce, egg, salt and pepper, mixing lightly but thoroughly. Shape beef mixture to form an 8- by 4 1/2-inch loaf. Place on rack in an open roasting pan. Bake in a 350-degree F oven 1 hour or until no longer pink and juices run clear.

Meanwhile, prepare gravy; serve with meatloaf and mashed potatoes. Makes 6 servings.

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Cook sesame seeds to bring out the flavor

AP — Sautéing sesame seed and aniseed in your microwave oven brings out a rich, toasty flavor. Just cook them for a few minutes in oil until the sesame turns golden, then add the vegetables and lemon juice. The whole dish tastes like it's fresh from the wok. Only you'll know it's from the microwave oven.

Add lemon juice to sesame seed mixture. Add lemon-sesame mixture to vegetables; toss gently to coat. Makes 4 side-dish servings.

Nutrition information per serving: 72 cal., 3 g fat, 0 mg chol., 3 g pro., 10 g carbs., 3 g fiber, 192 mg sodium. RDA: 125 percent vit. A, 91 percent vit. C.

LEMON-SESAME VEGETABLES

- 2 teaspoons sesame seed
- 2 teaspoons olive oil or cooking oil
- 1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon aniseed or caraway seed
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1 1/2 cups halved brussels sprouts or one 10-ounce package brussels sprouts, thawed and halved
- 2 cups sliced bok choy
- 2 medium carrots, bias sliced (1 cup)
- 2 tablespoons water
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice

In a 1-cup glass measure combine sesame seed, oil, aniseed or caraway seed, salt and pepper. Cover with waxed paper; cook on 100 percent power (high) for 3 to 4 minutes or until sesame seed is lightly toasted, stirring once. Set aside.

In a 1 1/2-quart microwave-safe casserole combine brussels sprouts, bok choy and carrots. Add water. Cover and cook on high for 6 to 8 minutes or until crisp-tender, stirring once. Drain.

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