

## Easter Breads – A Brief Overview and Sample Recipes

European and Eastern European countries, especially, enjoy traditional breads during Holy Week and Easter. Normally (but not in every case) these breads are sweetened (often with dried fruits)—a tradition dating as far back as ancient times in Greece’s Homeric period, when the treat was called “honey-leavened” bread; in ancient Rome, when people enjoyed panettone-type sweet breads; and in the Byzantine period, when Orthodox Christians ate sweetened “communion” bread to celebrate the “sweet” joy of Jesus’ resurrection and the new life in Christ offered to us as a result. American versions of Easter breads are also traditional in some families. Some of these breads enjoyed today include:



**Babka** (Poland, Ukraine, Belarus): a tall, cylindrical bread often baked in a Bundt-type pan and containing raisins and/or candied citron or orange peel, optionally with icing on the top, thus making it much sweeter than Paska (see below)—also made only for Easter to celebrate the rising of Christ from the dead

**Cozonac** (Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia): a slightly sweet yeast bread containing raisins and walnuts or pecans—a type of Stollen (see Paasstol below)

**Easter Egg Bread** (United States) (*below, see the recipe shared by Director of Alumnae/i and Church Relations the Rev. Carolyn Cranston '99*)

**Folar** (Portugal): a bread that may be either sweet or salty and is traditionally offered to godfathers, and priests at Easter in imitation of Jesus’ distribution of bread to his disciples at the Last Supper

**Gluten-free Communion Bread** (*below, see this creative idea provided by Director of the Church Planting Initiative the Rev. Karen Rohrer*)

**Hornazo** (Spain): a yeast bread meat pie stuffed with pork loin, spicy chorizo, and hard-boiled eggs

**Hot Cross Buns** (Great Britain): a spiced sweet bun containing currants or raisins (and sometimes other dried fruits), marked on top with icing in the shape of a cross, and traditionally eaten on Good Friday (*below, see the recipes shared by Director of Continuing Education Helen Blier and Vice President for Seminary Advancement Christine Chakoian*)

**Kalach** (Serbia, Hungary): similar to brioche and usually baked in a braid arranged to form a circle

**Kulich** (Russia): similar to panettone and eaten only between Easter and Pentecost, decorated with white icing and flowers, and historically served with soft sweet cheese (*below, see the recipe shared by Deb Burgess '06*)

**Mazanec** (Czech Republic): a sweet bread eaten throughout Holy Week made of dough containing rum-soaked raisins and dried fruit, baked as a round loaf, with slivered almonds on top and a decoration made of icing or powdered sugar in the shape of a cross

**Osterbrot** (Germany): a yeast bread containing raisins and slivered almonds and usually cut into thin slices, spread with butter, and enjoyed at breakfast or at tea time

**Paasstol** (or “Stol”) (Netherlands): a fruit-bread containing raisins and usually filled with almond paste (also made at Christmas)

**Pasca** (Romania, Moldova): a sweet bread served with soft sweet cheese that may also be decorated with fruits, nuts, or chocolate

**Paska** (Ukraine, Belarus, Slovakia, Georgia): a broad, round, rich, white bread decorated on the top with symbols, including crosses, flowers, braids, wheat, or other designs representing aspects of Orthodox (Eastern) Christianity—made only for Easter to celebrate the rising of Christ from the dead

**Pasqua**, or *colomba di Pasqua* (Italy): a cake containing candied peel but no raisins and topped with pearl sugar and almonds before being baked in the shape of a *colomba*, or “dove”

**Pinca** (Croatia, Montenegro): a sweet bread loaf with the sign of a cross carved on top before being baked, and eaten at the end of Lent

**Tsoureki** (Greece, Armenia): a sweet holiday bread commonly seasoned with orange zest, mastic resin (from the mastic tree), or *mahlab* (an aromatic spice made from the pits of the Mediterranean “St. Lucy’s” cherry tree)

## Recipes

### Easter Egg Bread

shared by Carolyn Cranston’99, Director of Alumnae/i and Church Relations

This bread is traditionally shaped in the form of a wreath (as according to the instructions given here). Some people form it in the shape of a rabbit or an Easter basket.

Begin by lightly buttering a 15½ x 12 inch baking sheet. Then:

Color 5 uncooked eggs by dipping them in food dye. Set them aside.

Soften 2 pkgs of active dry yeast in ½ cup of warm water (110-115 degrees F). *If using compressed yeast, soften 2 cakes in ½ cup of lukewarm water (80-85 degrees F).*

Let the yeast stand for 5-10 minutes. Meanwhile, pour ½ cup of warm water into a large bowl and blend in 1½ cups of sifted flour. Then:



Stir the softened yeast and add it to the flour-water mixture. Mix well and beat till very smooth. Cover the bowl with waxed paper and a towel and let stand in a warm place (about 80 degrees F) for 1½-2 hours.

Meanwhile, cream the following together till softened:

¾ cup of shortening  
2 Tbs lemon juice  
1 Tbs grated lemon peel

Gradually add (until fluffy after each addition) a mixture of:

1 cup sugar  
1 tsp salt

Separately, beat together the following until thick and piled softly:

2 eggs  
1 egg white

Then add the beaten eggs in thirds to the sugar mixture. Beat thoroughly after each addition. Then add the yeast mixture and mix well.

Measure out 4½-4¾ cups sifted flour, and add about one-half the flour to the already mixed ingredients. Beat until very smooth. Then mix in enough of the remaining flour to make a soft dough, and knead it on a lightly floured surface.

Shape the dough into a smooth ball and place it into a greased bowl large enough to allow it to double in size. Cover the bowl with waxed paper and a towel and let the dough rise to about double its size (about 1½-2 hours).

Then punch down the dough with a fist, divide it into two equal balls, and let them stand for 10 minutes in the covered bowl.

Then roll each ball out to a length of about 36 inches and a thickness of 1-1½ inches. With the two rolls of dough, form a loosely braided ring, leaving spaces for the five colored eggs. Place the ring on the prepared baking sheet, then place the colored eggs into the spaces left in the braid. Cover the ring loosely with a towel, and set it aside in a warm place.

When it has doubled in size, bake the braided ring at 350 degrees F for 10 minutes.

Remove it from the oven and brush the bread with a mixture of:

1 egg yolk  
1 Tbs milk

Then sprinkle it with tiny multicolored candies.

Bake the bread-ring for another 40-45 minutes or until it is golden brown. (The eggs will then be hard-cooked.)

### **Gluten-free Easter Communion Bread**

shared by the Rev. Karen Rohrer, Director of the Church Planting Initiative

Earlier, in Karen's previous church-plant in Philadelphia, "It was our practice, each week during the year, for someone to make a gluten-free communion bread from one of Pamela's (brand) bagged mixes. If you have a vegan in the congregation, you can use bananas instead of eggs and still have a tasty every-Sunday bread. (Beware there is honey in the mix, which some vegans don't eat.)

But for **Easter Sunday** we wanted something special and similarly easy to make. We found that Pamela's gluten-free, dairy-free vanilla cake mix (which can be found online) could be easily mixed as pound cake and baked in a loaf pan. (For vegans, try substituting coconut oil for butter and bananas for eggs.) As with all gluten-free mixes, the bread turns out a bit crumbly, but we had the joy of watching people's faces shift as they took Communion on Easter Sunday and were just a bit surprised by the sweetness of the celebration."



### **Hot Cross Buns: Traditional British Good Friday Fare**

first recipe shared by Dr. Helen Blier, Director of Continuing Education

second recipe shared by the Rev. Dr. Christine Chakoian, Vice President for Seminary Advancement

The origins of these buns are murky—some people say they originated in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Tradition has it that they are to be eaten on Good Friday. The iced cross recalls the crucifixion, the spices call to mind the burial of Jesus, and the sweetness of the dried fruit heralds the resurrection.

#### ***Recipe #1***

Fruit:

Mix ½ cup dried, minced fruit (apricots, currants, raisins) with ¼ cup apple juice; microwave until the fruit is soft. Set aside.

Dough:

Proof the yeast first. Sprinkle 2 tsp of instant yeast over 1¼ cups of milk at 100°F. Set aside and ensure the yeast gets foamy (meaning it is 'live').

In a bowl, mix the remaining dry ingredients in a standing mixer bowl:

4½ cups all-purpose flour

1 Tbs baking powder

1¾ tsp salt

1 tsp cinnamon

¼ tsp each nutmeg and clove

¼ cups brown sugar



Once thoroughly mixed, add and mix in:  
6 Tbs room-temperature butter

Then add:  
2 large eggs + 1 yolk (reserve the white for brushing the buns)  
Milk and yeast mixture

Knead the mixture with the dough hook or by hand until soft and elastic (about 4-5 minutes). Mix in the fruit, drained of any leftover liquid.

Let the dough rise for an hour until puffy. While the dough rises, grease a 9x13 pan.

Once the dough is risen, grease your hands and divide the dough into tennis-ball sized balls. Place the balls evenly in the greased pan; you should have 12-14 buns. Let them rise for another hour; they will get puffy again and crowd each other in the pan.

Whisk together unused egg white with 1 Tbs milk. Brush the mixture on the bun tops.  
Bake at 375°F for about 20 min, until golden brown.

While they bake, make the icing by beating together  
1 cups +2 Tbs confectioners' sugar  
½ tsp vanilla  
Pinch of salt  
About 3-4 Tbs milk (until icing is thick and able to be piped)

Once the buns have finished cooling, use a Ziploc baggie with the corner snipped off to pipe an icing cross onto each bun.

## ***Recipe #2***

This recipe comes from Chris Chakoian via her “grandmother-in-law”—her husband’s grandmother. Optionally, you may include currants or candied fruitcake fruit, as listed in the ingredients below.

Gather the following ingredients:

¼ cup milk  
¼ cup butter  
1 tsp salt  
¼ cup sugar  
½ tsp vanilla  
1 package yeast (in ¼ cup of warm water)  
2 eggs (beaten)  
(¼ cup currants and/or ¼ cup candied fruit, if desired)  
¾ tsp cinnamon  
Some allspice  
About 3½ cups flour



Directions:

Scald milk

Add butter, salt, sugar, and vanilla

When cool, add yeast and beaten eggs (and, optionally, currants and/or candied fruit)

Stir cinnamon and allspice in with flour, then add and mix

Place dough in greased bowl, brush dough with butter, and cover with damp cloth till it doubles in size.

Form dough into balls slightly smaller than an egg.

Bake at 350 degrees for 25-30 minutes.

Icing:

1 Tbs milk or cream

½ tsp vanilla

1 cup powdered sugar

After the buns are completely cooled, use the icing to form a cross on top of each bun. (If you really like icing—as Chris’s grandmother-in-law does!—slather it across the top of the whole bun!)

### **Kulich: Traditional Russian Easter-to-Pentecost Bread**

shared from Belgorod, Russia, by Deb Burgess '06

Ingredients:

4 cups flour

½ cup sugar

2 eggs

2 egg yolks

½ cup unsalted butter, melted

½ cup lukewarm milk

1 packet dry yeast (2.5 tsp)

½ cup almonds, coarsely ground

½ cup candied lemon and orange peel, finely chopped

1 Tbs rum or Cointreau

½ cup currants

½ cup sultanas (golden raisins)

½ tsp vanilla

Grated rind of one lemon

A few strands of saffron

A pinch of salt

### **Icing**

1 cup powdered sugar

Remaining liquid from soaked fruit

Enough egg white to create a smooth paste



## Directions

1. Soak currents and sultanas in the rum/Cointreau.
2. In a large bowl, soak yeast in  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup lukewarm water and 1 tsp. of sugar for 10 minutes or until it begins to foam.
3. Scald the milk over moderate heat, stir in saffron and let cool to lukewarm.
4. Add the milk and saffron to the bowl with the yeast.
5. Add the remaining  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup of sugar and one cup of flour to the liquid; mix well. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let it rise in a warm place for 1 hour.
6. After rising, stir in the melted butter, eggs, egg yolks, salt, raisins, almonds, fruit peel, vanilla, lemon zest and 2 cups of flour; mix. The dough should pull away from the sides of the bowl. Add small amounts of flour as necessary until it does. Turn the dough out onto a floured surface and knead, kneading in the remaining flour. Knead until the dough is smooth and elastic.
7. Place the dough in a buttered bowl and turn to coat. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap and let the dough rise an hour and a half.
8. Option 1:  
While the dough is rising, butter the inside of a 2lb. coffee can and line the sides and bottom with parchment paper. The paper should extend at least 2" above the top of the can.  
Option 2:  
One can also use the 7" panettone papers found at stores such as Sur la Table. There is no need to grease the paper forms.
9. After the dough has risen, knead it briefly. Form it into a ball and place in the prepared can or paper. Let the dough rise to the top of the container (45 minutes to an hour).
10. While the dough is rising preheat the oven to 390°. Bake the kulich for 15 minutes before reducing the heat to 350°. Bake for 30-35 minutes more.
11. Let the kulich cool on a rack completely before removing from the can (if using), otherwise simply cool on a rack.
12. When the kulich is cool, whisk together the powdered sugar, remaining liquid from the raisins and the egg white. Glaze the kulich, letting the glaze drip down the sides. It is customary to sprinkle candy sprinkles on the still-damp glaze.