



Easter

Bank holidays, daffodils and chocolate!

by Hazel Foster

Did you know that when eating a chocolate Easter bunny, 76% bite off the ears first, 5% go for the feet and 4% opt for the tail?

This month's recipes are Easter holiday favourites, Hot Cross Buns and some special home-made Easter eggs. Enjoy!

Hot Cross Buns (Makes 15)

For the dough: 50g butter
500g strong bread flour
1 tsp salt
75g caster sugar
1 tbsp sunflower oil
7g sachet fast-action or easy-blend yeast (fast-action or easy-blend yeast can be added straight to the dry ingredients unlike dried yeast which needs to be dissolved in liquid first)
1 egg, beaten
75g sultanas
50g mixed peel
2 tsp ground cinnamon
1 tsp mixed spice (optional)



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For the cross

75g plain flour, plus extra for dusting

For the glaze

3 tbsp apricot jam

Method

Bring milk to the boil, remove from heat and add butter. Leave to cool until it reaches hand temperature. Put the flour, salt, sugar, cinnamon, mixed spice and yeast into a bowl. Make a well in the centre. Pour in the warm milk and butter mixture, then add the egg. Mix well, then bring everything together with your hands until you have a sticky dough. Tip onto a lightly floured surface and knead by holding the dough with one hand and stretching it with the heel of the other hand, then folding it back on itself. Repeat for 5 mins until smooth and elastic. Put the dough in a lightly oiled bowl. Cover with cling film and leave to rise in a warm place for 1 hr or until doubled in size.

With the dough still in the bowl, tip in the sultanas and mixed peel. Knead into the dough, making sure everything is well distributed. Leave to rise for 1 hr more, or until doubled in size, covered by some well-oiled cling film to stop the dough getting a crust.

Divide the dough into 15 even pieces. Roll each piece into a smooth ball on a lightly floured work surface. Arrange the buns on one or two baking trays lined with parchment, leaving enough space for the dough to expand. Cover (but don't wrap) with more oiled cling film, or a clean tea towel, then set aside to prove for 1 hr.

Heat oven to 220°C/200°C fan/gas 7. Mix the flour with about 5 tbsp water to make the paste for the cross - add the water 1 tbsp at a time, so you add just enough for a thick paste. Spoon into a piping bag with a small nozzle. Pipe a line along each row of buns, then repeat in the other direction to create crosses. Bake for 20 mins on the middle shelf of the oven, until golden brown.

Gently heat the apricot jam to melt, then sieve. While the jam is still warm, brush over the top of the warm buns and leave to cool.



Homemade Easter Eggs

I came up with this idea whilst trying to think of how to make an Easter egg that wouldn't need a mould. You could display them in the egg-box like I have, or make smaller ones and put them in a chocolate nest (melted chocolate with shredded wheat was always the best way to make it look like a nest - but cornflakes works too, then shape into a nest and leave on parchment to set).

You can create all the flavours you like just by adding to the ganache, so orange essence or triple sec for choc orange, peppermint essence for mint choc, chopped nuts, Baileys, peanut butter, Smarties, Nutella, coffee and you can use either milk, white or plain chocolate.

Truffle Ganache

Depends how many you want to make - just 3 x amount of chocolate to cream)
100ml double cream
300g chocolate, broken into pieces and put into a bowl

Bring the cream just to the boil in a pan. Turn off the heat and pour over chocolate. Stir until melted, then add the flavouring you want - e.g. 3tsp peppermint essence. Cool, then chill until the mixture is firm (2-3+ hrs).



Bounty Eggs

Alternatively you could make this coconut filling for your eggs

200g desiccated coconut
1 can condensed milk (lait concentré sucré)(397g)

Mix well then leave to firm up in fridge. Scoop out enough of the chocolate or coconut mixture for the size you want then shape into eggs. Leave in fridge to firm up for a while. Insert cake-pop stick into bottom of the egg. Melt 200g chocolate in microwave stirring at 30 second intervals until melted, or in a bowl over simmering water and allow to cool slightly (but not harden). A smaller deeper bowl will help with dipping and coating your eggs. Dip your eggs into the melted chocolate, standing them on their sticks between each coat. I found the coconut filling less firm so difficult to keep on sticks, so alternatively you can sit them onto a cooling rack over a tray and pour chocolate over (you can scrape the choc from under and re-melt). Keep coating until you have the thickness you want. I covered mine in 2 coats of white choc to make them look like eggs, but you could also decorate with sprinkles, nuts or edible glitter.



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