



The Bakery Cinnamon Rolls

My earliest memories of The Bakery revolve around these cinnamon rolls. A Grand Central favorite since Day One, they are the only item we've never taken off the menu. The lightly grainy dough is made with whole wheat flour, the healthy alternative to its refined counterpart that identifies these as a product of the 1970s. The combination of that dough and the sugary cinnamon syrup on the bottom sets these cinnamon rolls apart from the rest.

Cinnamon rolls are the perfect answer to breakfast occasions that call for a special treat. Or offer them instead of toast, as a sweet complement to scrambled eggs and bacon that feels a little bit decadent, like having dessert after breakfast.

Beginning the fermentation with a sponge (or preferment) improves the texture and flavor of this whole grain dough. I recommend mixing the dough and forming the rolls the day before you plan to eat them. When you awaken, put them out to rise and you'll have hot cinnamon rolls less than two hours later.

Makes one 9 by 13 by 2-inch pan, or 12 rolls

Sponge

2-1/2 cups (20 ounces) tepid water, approximately 70 degrees
2 teaspoons active dry yeast
3 tablespoons molasses (not blackstrap)
1/2 cup (2.5 ounces) whole wheat flour
1/2 cup (3 ounces) eight-grain cereal
2 cups (10 ounces) unbleached white bread flour

Final Dough

Active sponge
2-1/2 cups (12.5 ounces) unbleached white bread flour
4 tablespoons (2 ounces/1/2 stick) unsalted butter, melted and cooled slightly
1 tablespoon + 1 teaspoon salt

Filling

8 tablespoons (4 ounces/1 stick) unsalted butter, at room temperature
3/4 cup (5.25 ounces) granulated sugar
3/4 cup (5.5 ounces) brown sugar
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 cup (1.5 ounces) currants

Make sponge.

Whisk ingredients together in a mixing bowl with high sides. Cover tightly with plastic wrap and allow mixture sit out at room temperature for 2 hours, or in the refrigerator until it shows signs of active fermentation, about 12 hours. It should be bubbly and stringy when you stir it.

Mix final dough.

Combine active sponge with flour, butter and salt in the bowl of a stand mixer fitted with the dough hook attachment. Mix on low speed until dry ingredients are fully incorporated, 2 to 3 minutes. Increase speed to medium for 3 to 4 more minutes. The dough should be smooth and pull away from the sides of the bowl. If you don't have a stand mixer, combine ingredients with a wooden spoon until they are incorporated completely. Knead dough on a lightly floured surface until it is a smooth, cohesive mass.

Let dough rise.

Put the dough in a large bowl lightly brushed with oil or butter. Cover with plastic wrap and let rise until dough doubles in size. The indentation left when you poke dough gently should spring back slowly. You can speed the process along by putting the dough in a warm spot (80°F), or slow it down in a cooler spot (60°F). Use the refrigerator to stretch the process out over an entire day. At the bakery, we chill the dough for an hour after it has risen to the desired height. During this time, the activity of the yeast slows down, and dough becomes slightly stiffer, making it easier to form.

Prepare baking pan and filling.

Grease baking pan with 2 tablespoons butter. Reserve remaining 6 tablespoons to make filling.

For filling, combine brown and white sugar with cinnamon. Reserve 1/3 cup to sprinkle on top of rolls before baking.

Roll and fill dough.

Turn dough out onto a lightly floured surface. Use a combination of gentle stretching and light rolling to shape into 20 by 12-inch rectangle. Spread remaining soft butter over entire rectangle of dough, sprinkle with larger quantity of cinnamon sugar and scatter currants on top.

Shape dough.

Begin rolling from the bottom using a good amount of pressure and wrist action as you push dough forward then pull it back toward you. This creates a nice tight roll. The log should be 20 to 24 inches long and 2 to 3 inches in diameter.

Cut rolls.

Using a serrated knife, slice dough log in half. Score each half in six 2-inch thick rolls and cut. Arrange rolls in baking pan so that they are evenly spaced, 3 by 4. As you place rolls in buttered pan, “tuck and goose” each one.

Let rolls rise.

Cover pan loosely with plastic wrap and allow rolls to sit in a warm spot (at least 75°F) 30 to 60 minutes before refrigerating overnight. This time will vary, depending on the temperature of your kitchen. Look for signs that yeast is active: the rolls will expand and swell slightly; the sides will come close to touching one another; and/or moisture will form on inside of plastic wrap.

Proof and bake.

Preheat the oven to 350°F when you wake up. Take cinnamon rolls from refrigerator and leave in a warm spot (75 to 80°F)—the top of your oven as it preheats is perfect—to come to room temperature and rise. Do not remove plastic wrap. You’ll know rolls have proofed properly when they touch one another and dough is soft enough that it springs back leisurely when lightly poked.

Sprinkle remaining 1/3 cup cinnamon sugar on tops of rolls and bake 35 to 45 minutes, or until dark golden brown. Rotate the pan once, from front to back. If rolls begin to color too much, reduce heat to 325°F after first 30 minutes.

[Sidebar or simple graphic illustration]

Tuck and Goose

The characteristic perky, conical shape of our cinnamon rolls is achieved by gently stretching the loose end of dough, wrapping it around itself and tucking the remaining 1-1/2-inch under and into the center of the bottom of each roll. Push up slightly at the same time, to make the center pop out.

