

≧ WHY IT'S YOUR FAVORITE ≦

“This was the very first ‘bread’ I ever made. It was Thanksgiving, and when I announced to my husband I was making homemade rolls, his eyes widened in panic. ‘Why make it hard on yourself? Just buy some rolls.’ I think he was hoping to talk me out of it. When he saw them emerge from the oven, all doubt was removed. They were amazing. I couldn’t believe I did it!”

into a kind of membrane (bakers call this a “gluten cloak”) but does not affect the proteins on the interior, which remain random. The Japanese milk bread’s shaping method was elaborate, and now I suspected that it was the key to the bread’s delicate vertical layers. To shape that loaf, I had divided the dough into four pieces, rolled each one into a rectangle, and folded each rectangle into thirds like a business letter; then I flattened each piece of dough out again and rolled it up again like a jelly roll before nestling it into the loaf pan with the others.

Because I was shaping 12 dinner rolls instead of four larger dough pieces, I tried a simplified version, flattening each piece into a long, narrow rectangle before rolling it up and placing it in the pan. When

SCIENCE What Is This Thing Called Tangzhong?

The *tangzhong* method calls for briefly cooking a portion of the flour and water to make a paste, which is then combined with the rest of the ingredients. By using hot water, we can actually add more liquid to the dough because flour can absorb twice as much hot water as cold water. The superhydrated dough yields rolls that are not just moist but also fluffy because the water converts to steam, which acts as a leavening agent, creating rise. The extra water also increases gluten development, giving the bread the structure it needs to contain the steam rather than letting it escape.



HOT WATER PASTE
The paste should be stiff and smooth.

TECHNIQUE | STRETCH AND ROLL

Rolling the dough into balls, as most recipes instruct, causes the gluten to organize randomly and the crumb to be sponge-like. Stretching and rolling the dough into tight spirals organizes the gluten into sheets, and the rolls develop delicate, distinct layers.



FORM Gently stretch and press dough into 8 by 2-inch strip.



ROLL Starting at 1 end, roll strip into snug cylinder.



ARRANGE Place cylinders seam side down in prepared pan.

the rolls had doubled, they looked especially smooth and plump, thanks to the strong gluten development. I baked them to a deep golden brown, removed them from the pan, and brushed them with ½ tablespoon of melted butter.

When I tasted one roll, it separated from the others cleanly, and I delightedly peeled away layer after delicate layer. The combined effect of the added liquid in the flour paste, the well-developed gluten, and the unusual shaping had given me the ideal dinner roll: moist, tender, and particularly fluffy. The most convincing part of all: The rolls were great the next day when I refreshed them in the oven, a real bonus when making them for a holiday dinner.

FLUFFY DINNER ROLLS

MAKES 12 ROLLS

We strongly recommend weighing the flour for the dough. The slight tackiness of the dough aids in flattening and stretching it in step 5, so do not dust your counter with flour. This recipe requires letting the dough rest for at least 2 hours before baking. The rolls can be made a day ahead. To refresh them before serving, wrap them in aluminum foil and heat them in a 350-degree oven for 15 minutes.

Flour Paste

- ½ cup water
- 3 tablespoons bread flour

Dough

- ½ cup cold milk
- 1 large egg
- 2 cups (11 ounces) bread flour
- 1½ teaspoons instant or rapid-rise yeast
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces and softened, plus ½ tablespoon melted
- Vegetable oil spray

1. **FOR THE FLOUR PASTE:** Whisk water and flour in small bowl until no lumps remain.

Microwave, whisking every 20 seconds, until mixture thickens to stiff, smooth, pudding-like consistency that forms mound when dropped from end of whisk into bowl, 40 to 80 seconds.

2. **FOR THE DOUGH:** In bowl of stand mixer, whisk flour paste and milk until smooth. Add egg and whisk until incorporated. Add flour and yeast. Fit stand mixer with dough hook and mix on low speed until all flour is moistened, 1 to 2 minutes. Let stand for 15 minutes.

3. Add sugar and salt and mix on medium-low speed for 5 minutes. With mixer running, add softened butter, 1 piece at a time. Continue to mix on medium-low speed 5 minutes longer, scraping down dough hook and sides of bowl occasionally (dough will stick to bottom of bowl).

4. Transfer dough to very lightly floured counter. Knead briefly to form ball and transfer, seam side down, to lightly greased bowl; lightly coat surface of dough with oil spray and cover with plastic wrap. Let rise until doubled in volume, about 1 hour.

5. Grease 9-inch round cake pan and set aside. Transfer dough to counter. Press dough gently but firmly to expel all air. Pat and stretch dough to form 8 by 9-inch rectangle with short side facing you. Cut dough lengthwise into 4 equal strips and cut each strip crosswise into 3 equal pieces. Working with 1 piece at a time, stretch and press dough gently to form 8 by 2-inch strip. Starting on short side, roll dough to form snug cylinder. Arrange shaped rolls seam side down in prepared pan, placing 10 rolls around edge of pan, pointing inward, and remaining 2 rolls in center. Cover with plastic and let rise until doubled, 45 minutes to 1 hour.

6. When rolls are nearly doubled, adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 375 degrees. Bake rolls until deep golden brown, 25 to 30 minutes. Let rolls cool in pan on wire rack for 3 minutes; invert rolls onto rack, then reinvert. Brush tops and sides of rolls with melted butter. Let rolls cool for at least 20 minutes before serving.

📺 Recipe video available at CooksIllustrated.com