

Celebrate National Bread Month with Crusty Water Rolls

“Without bread, even a palace would be sad, but with it a pine tree is paradise,” so goes the old Slavic proverb. You can celebrate National Bread Month with delicious homemade rolls on Thanksgiving. Even if you don’t have room on your plate for a fresh roll on Turkey day they make wonderful mini sandwiches of leftovers the following day. There are some things you can skimp on, get them out of a can or use a modern appliance to make, but crusty water rolls don’t belong in any of these categories.



It was only after the Pilgrims came to America that baking bread in private homes became the norm. Our ancient forbearers baked bread in communal ovens. These ovens were built on the out skirts of villages, near water due to the extreme fire hazards of the early brick ovens. Later in Europe, after the Romans taught the indigenous peoples about bread making, bread was still baked in large ovens. Except these ovens were not communal ovens they were owned, as was the mill, by the local lord. This made families dependant on the lord for their daily bread. By the Middle Ages baking guilds controlled who and how breads were baked and sold. These organizations limited the number of bakers and bakeries in each village and that meant even impoverished peasants had to purchase bread.

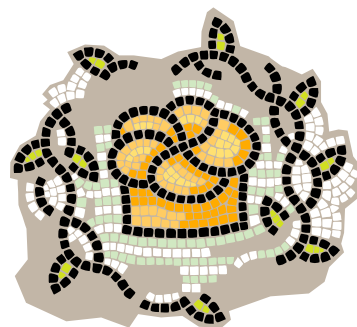
When the first colonists came to North America they demanded the right to be in control of their daily bread. Households at last could bake bread at home. Even commoners were in control of their daily bread.

Thanksgiving is a time when we celebrate our agricultural abundance with turkey and all the trimmings including yeasted rolls. I have made Crusty Water Rolls for many holiday meals and have never been disappointed. These delightfully crusty glazed rolls are soft and moist inside with a crunchy cornmeal bottom crust. The recipe originally came from the “Sunset Cook Book of Breads” edited by Susan Warton and Kandace Esplund Reeves which is still in print.

Crusty Water Rolls 18 rolls

Preheat oven to 400°F

- 1 cup warm water, about 110°F.
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1½ teaspoon salt
- 1 package active dry yeast
- 3½ - 4 cups all-purpose flour, sifted
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 2 eggs whites



Cornmeal (for dipping rolls)

1 egg white beaten with 1 tablespoon of water (brushing)

In a large bowl, combine water, sugar, salt and yeast, let stand until bubbly (about 15 minutes). Then add 1 cup of the flour and the oil, beat until smooth. Beat egg whites until stiff but not dry; fold into batter. Gradually beat in about 2 cups of the remaining flour to make a stiff dough. Turn dough onto a floured board; knead until smooth and satiny (5-20 minutes), adding flour as needed to prevent sticking.

Turn dough over in a greased bowl. Cover and let rise in a warm place until doubled in bulk, about 1 hour.

Punch dough down, cover and let rest for 15 minutes. This is important because the dough will be easy to shape after the rest time. Punch down again, knead briefly on a lightly floured board to release air. Divide into 18 pieces.

Shape each piece into a ball; dip bottoms in cornmeal.

Place rolls, about 1½ inches apart, on a greased baking sheet. Cover and let rise until almost doubled, about 50 minutes.

Brush rolls with egg white and water mixture.

Place a shallow pan of hot water on the lowest oven rack. Bake rolls in a 400° F. oven, on a rack just above the pan of water for 15 – 20 minutes or until nicely browned. Cool on racks.

Nutrition information: 100 calories per roll, 1.5g fat, 0g saturated fat, 0g trans fat, 0mg cholesterol, 200mg sodium, total carbohydrate 18g, dietary fiber 0g, protein 3g, vitamin A 0%, Vitamin C 0%, Calcium 0%, iron 6%

Note: you can use up to 1½ cups of whole wheat flour in place of white flour, do not sift the whole wheat flour, this adds 2 grams of fiber to each roll.

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