ST. NICHOLAS DAY · DECEMBER 6

St. Nicholas Weckmann bread men

Prep 35 min **Cook** 18 min **Rise** 1 hr 30 min **Total** 2 hr 23 min **Makes** 6 bread men **Level** Medium

ADULT SUPERVISION REQUIRED

Cooking is for children and grown-ups together. An adult should supervise at all times and handle the oven, stovetop, knives, and anything hot. A grown-up snips the arms and legs with kitchen scissors and moves the hot baking sheets. Raisins are a choking hazard for children under 4, so pick them out or cut the bread small. If you add a clay pipe from a bakery, it is a decoration only: take it out before a child eats the bread.

ALLERGY INFORMATION

Contains wheat (gluten), milk, and egg. Always read ingredient labels, since brands vary, and ask about food allergies before you cook or share.

INGREDIENTS

- 4 cups (500 g) all-purpose flour, plus more for kneading
- 2¼ tsp (1 packet, 7 g) instant yeast
- ⅓ cup (65 g) sugar
- 1 tsp salt
- Finely grated zest of 1 lemon (optional)
- 1 cup (240 ml) lukewarm milk
- 1 large egg
- 5 tbsp (70 g) butter, softened

To decorate

- 1 egg yolk beaten with 1 tbsp milk
- About 3 tbsp raisins or currants, for eyes and buttons
- Pearl sugar or coarse sugar (optional)

METHOD

1. Mix the flour, yeast, sugar, salt, and lemon zest in a large bowl. Add the lukewarm milk (warm to the touch, about 105°F/40°C) and the egg and mix to a shaggy dough. Add the soft butter and knead for 8 to 10 minutes, by hand or with a dough hook, until smooth, soft, and springy.
2. Cover the bowl and let the dough rise in a warm place for about 1 hour, until doubled.
3. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper. Pinch off a walnut-size piece of dough for the croziers and keep it covered. Divide the rest into 6 equal pieces.
4. Roll each piece into a smooth log about 6 inches (15 cm) long and press it flat, about ¾ inch (2 cm) thick. Pinch in a neck about a third of the way down to make the head. A grown-up snips a slit on each side below the neck for arms and one up from the bottom for legs, then spreads them apart a little.
5. Roll the reserved dough into 6 thin ropes. Curl the top of each into a shepherd's crook and lay it along one arm, folding the hand over it. Press raisins deep into the dough for 2 eyes and 3 buttons, so they do not pop out in the oven.
6. Cover loosely and let rise 20 to 30 minutes, until puffy, while the oven heats to 350°F (175°C). Brush with the egg wash and sprinkle with pearl sugar if you like.
7. Bake 15 to 20 minutes, until deep golden brown and the bottoms sound hollow when tapped. Cool on a rack.

LITTLE HELPERS CAN (WITH A GROWN-UP)

- Knead the dough and feel it turn smooth
- Press in the raisin eyes and buttons
- Roll a thin rope and curl it into a crozier
- Brush on the shiny egg wash

GOOD TO KNOW

- Make the dough the night before: after kneading, cover and refrigerate it overnight, then shape it cold and allow about 45 minutes for the second rise.
- Weckmänner are best the day they are baked. The next day, warm them in the oven for a few minutes, or split and toast them and spread with butter and jam.

A BLESSING BEFORE WE EAT

Bless us, O Lord, and these thy gifts, which we are about to receive from thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen. Saint Nicholas, pray for us, and help us care for others the way a good shepherd cares for his flock.