

Shaping and Baking Dinner Rolls

How to make eight types of dinner rolls from a single dough.

~ BY NICK MALGIERI ~

Individual dinner rolls have been popular since the middle of the nineteenth century, when the brioche conquered Paris. In fact, for the roll variation here, I originally tried a dough that was closer to brioche, with a high butter, sugar, and egg content. But rolls made with this dough, although delicious, were too rich to eat with a meal.



Nick Malgieri believes that dinner rolls are popular because they are delicate in appearance, as well as easy to serve and eat.

The recipe I settled upon falls right in between good-quality white bread and brioche. Since these rolls are meant to accompany a meal, the sugar is kept to a minimum, just enough to impart a pleasantly sweet flavor that supports and enhances the flavor of the wheat. In addition, the dough is made with water rather than milk for ease of handling (the fat solids in milk can cause doughs to be stickier) and to prevent unnecessary richness. Eggs and either oil or butter are added for tenderness as well as color and flavor.

Once the dough has been made, you are ready to begin shaping it into various forms. First divide the dough in half. For all shapes except crescent, butterfly, and Parker House rolls, form the dough into small individual pieces. When doing so, be sure to stretch a smooth, even skin around the outside of the sphere in the final step (see illustration 3, right); the skin will become the crust of the roll, and blemishes will mar its final appearance.

After rounding the pieces of dough, allow them to rest for a few minutes under a towel. This resting period makes the elastic gluten strands in the dough relax so the dough is easy to handle and does not spring back when shaped; keeping the dough covered as it rests prevents it from forming a thick, uneven crust.

To make rolls of various shapes, follow the illustrated steps on pages 16 and 17.

When baking the rolls, I use a short, high-temperature bake. This encourages tenderness in the finished product because the interior retains moisture that migrates back to the sur-

face, thus softening it; long, slow baking at a low temperature, conversely, would provide a thick, hard crust.

MASTER RECIPE FOR DINNER ROLLS

Makes 16

- 4½ cups unbleached, all-purpose flour
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 2 teaspoons active dry yeast
- 1 cup warm water, about 110 degrees
- 2 large eggs
- 4 tablespoons melted butter or mild olive oil

Egg Wash

- 1 egg, well beaten with a pinch of salt

1. Measure flour, sugar, and salt into work-bowl of a food processor fitted with a steel blade, or a mixer bowl fitted with dough hook, or a large mixing bowl. Dissolve yeast in water; stir in eggs, then butter or oil. Pour yeast mixture over dry ingredients; if using food processor, pulse 6 or 8 times to form a dough ball; then process until dough is smooth and elastic, about 30 seconds. If using mixer, mix on low speed for 1 minute. Stop and scrape bowl to incorporate all ingredients, then continue mixing on low speed until dough is smooth and elastic, about 5 minutes. If mixing by hand, stir liquid with rubber spatula until dry ingredients are evenly moistened and dough is ropy and uneven in appearance. Cover bowl tightly with plastic wrap and allow dough to rest 5 minutes.

Then beat dough vigorously with rubber spatula or heavy wooden spoon until smooth and elastic, 8 to 10 minutes.

2. Put dough in a large lightly greased bowl; cover with a damp cloth and let rise until dough doubles in bulk, 1 to 1½ hours.

3. Turn dough onto a lightly floured work surface; press with palms of hands to deflate. If making crescents or butterflies, follow specific rolling and shaping instructions, (see page 17). For remaining shapes, halve the dough and roll each half to a thick cylinder (see illustration 1); cut each cylinder into 8 pieces (illustration 2); round each piece by rotating your hand over it while gently pressing to form the dough into a sphere (illustration 3); allow rounded pieces to rest under a towel for 5 minutes; then form individual shapes as shown in illustrations on pages 16 and 17.

4. Arrange shaped dough on 2 cookie sheets covered with lightly greased parchment paper. Cover with a damp towel or oiled plastic; let rise until almost doubled, 30 to 45 minutes.

5. Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Set one rack to upper third position, the other to lowest position. Brush risen rolls with egg wash.

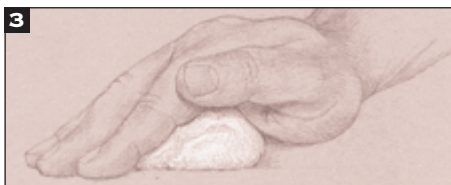
6. Bake until golden brown and an instant-read thermometer, when plunged into the roll's center, registers 200 degrees, 15 to 20 minutes. Remove from oven and serve at once or allow to cool to room temperature. Rolls can be loosely covered at room temperature up to 24 hours or placed in a plastic bag and frozen. ■

Nick Malgieri is the author of *Perfect Pastry* (Macmillan, 1989) and *Great Italian Desserts*

PREPARING THE DOUGH



1. After dividing dough in half, roll each half into a thick cylinder.



2. Cut each cylinder into eight equal pieces.

3. Round each piece by rotating your hand over it while gently pressing to form a sphere.

Shaping Individual Dinner Rolls



You can form an entire batch of dough into rolls of the same shape, or create several shapes from a single batch. For all shapes except crescent, butterfly, and Parker House rolls, first follow steps 1 through 3 on page 15 to divide the dough and round the individual pieces.

EYEGLASSES



1A. Gently roll rounded dough piece to elongate it into a 12-inch strand; be sure to position dough seam side down.

1B. Form a loop at each end of the strand, leaving a small gap in the center.



1C. Pull each end under and then up through the corresponding loop.



1D. Finished eyeglasses.

SMALL BRAID



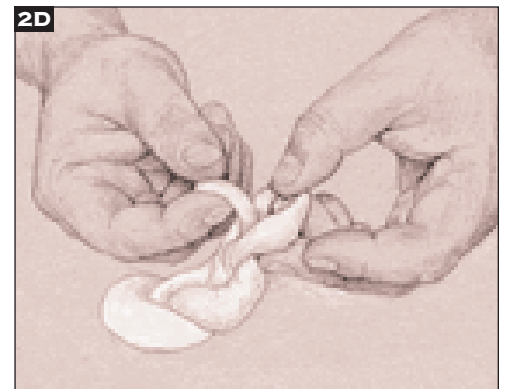
2A. Gently roll rounded dough piece into a 16-inch strand. Form the strand into the shape of a "6."



2C. Twist the other end of the loop toward you, flipping it over completely.



2B. Pull the stem of the "6" through one end of the loop.



2D. Thread the end of the stem under and through the twisted loop.

SINGLE KNOT

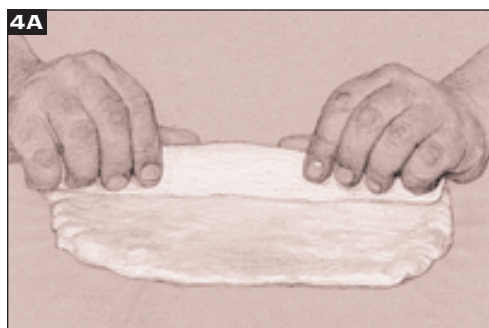


3A. Gently roll rounded dough piece into a 9-inch strand. Form strand into the shape of a "9."

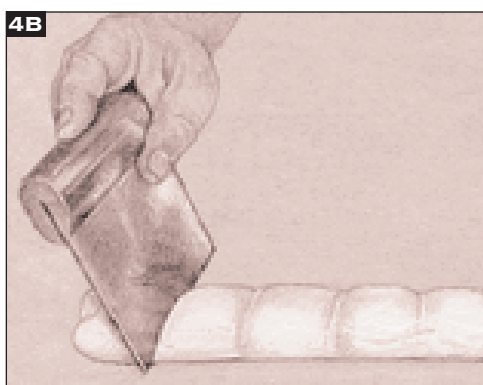


3B. Thread the long end of the of the "9" under and through the loop to form a knot.

BUTTERFLY



4A. Roll half of the dough into a 10-inch square, brush the square with two teaspoons melted butter or oil, roll up, and place seam-side down.

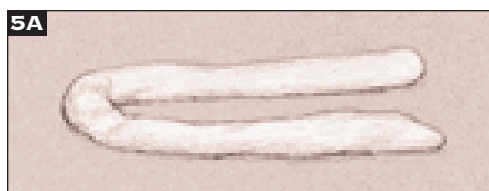


4B. Mark and cut into eight separate pieces.



4C. Press each piece of dough firmly with the handle of a wooden spoon to form butterflies.

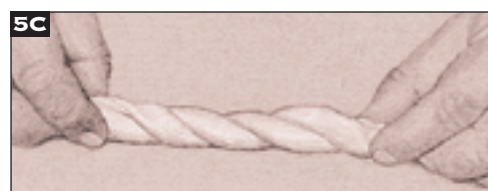
STICK OR TWIST



5A. Roll dough piece into a 12-inch strand. Form the strand into an elongated "U."



5B. Pinch the ends of the "U" firmly together.



5C. Grasp one end with each hand and twist several times in opposite directions.

DOUBLE KNOT



6A. Roll rounded dough piece into a 12-inch strand. Form the strand into a loop in the shape of a "9," as in single knot, but with longer end and wider opening.

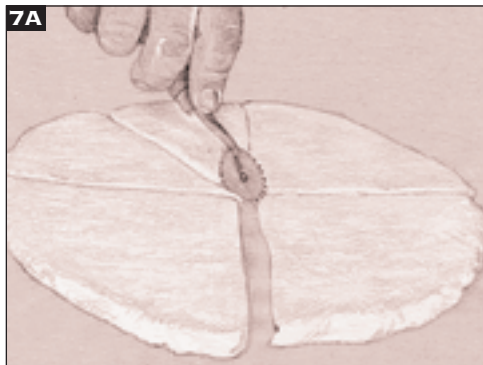


6B. Thread the stem of the "9" under and through the loop. Repeat, threading the stem through the remaining open section of the loop.



6C. Finished double knots.

CRESCENT



7A. Roll half of the dough into a 12-inch disk and cut it into eight wedges.



7B. Brush the disk lightly with melted butter or oil, roll up each section from the base of the wedge, and curve into crescents.

PARKER HOUSE



8A. Wrap a small heavy pan in a towel (not terry cloth) and flour the towel. Place the ball of dough on a floured surface and slam the pan against the dough to flatten it. Form dough into a 3-inch disk about 1/2-inch thick. Mark the diameter, pressing with wooden spoon handle.



8B. Brush lightly with melted butter and fold over so top half covers bottom half.