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Pecan Honey Sticky Buns

(Makes 15 buns)

Anyone who takes the time to make sticky buns thinks that his or hers are the best. In this regard, I'm just like everyone else. My sticky buns are made from buttery brioche dough, so right off the bat, you know they're special. The dough is spread with more butter and sprinkled with cinnamon and sugar, and then the rolls are left to rise in their sticky glaze. The glaze is very sweet, very sugary and very delicious. It's made of brown sugar, butter, honey and lots of pecans, and when it's baked, the pecans turn into pralines. What's not to like?

If you don't want 15 eat-them-now sticky buns, you can make fewer and freeze the remaining dough. You'll just need to adjust the quantity of glaze. See the instructions for shaping the buns, and Storing for more information.

FOR THE GLAZE:

1 cup (packed) light brown sugar
1 stick (8 tablespoons) unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces
1/4 cup honey
1-1/2 cups pecans (whole or pieces)

FOR THE FILLING:

1/4 cup sugar
3 tablespoons (packed) light brown sugar
1 tablespoon ground cinnamon
3 tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature

FOR THE BUNS:

1/2 recipe dough for Golden Brioche Loaves, chilled and ready to shape (make the full recipe and cut the dough in half after refrigerating it overnight)

Generously butter a 9-x-13-inch baking pan (a Pyrex pan is perfect for this).

TO MAKE THE GLAZE:

In a heavy-bottomed saucepan bring the brown sugar, butter and honey to a boil over medium-low heat stirring frequently to dissolve the sugar. Pour the glaze into the buttered pan, evening it out as best you can by tilting the pan or spreading the glaze with a heatproof spatula. Sprinkle over the pecans.

TO MAKE THE FILLING:

Mix the sugars and cinnamon together in a bowl. If necessary, in another bowl, work the butter with a spatula until it is soft, smooth and spreadable.



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Pecan Honey Sticky Buns, continued

TO SHAPE THE BUNS:

On a flour-dusted work surface, roll the chilled dough into a 16-inch square. Using your fingers or a pastry brush, spread the softened butter over the dough. Sprinkle the dough with the cinnamon sugar, leaving a 1-inch strip bare on the side farthest from you. Starting with the side nearest you, roll the dough into a cylinder, keeping the roll as tight as you can. (At this point, you can wrap the dough airtight and freeze it for up to 2 months; see Storing for instructions. Or if you want to make just part of the recipe now, you can use as much of the dough as you'd like and freeze the remainder. Reduce the glaze recipe accordingly).

With a chef's knife, using a gentle sawing motion, trim just a tiny bit from the ends of the roll if they're very ragged or not well filled, then cut the log into 1-inch-thick buns. (Because you trim the ragged ends of the dough, and you may have lost a little length in the rolling, you will get 15 buns not 16). Fit the buns into the pan cut side down, leaving some space between them.

Lightly cover the pan with a piece of wax paper and set the pan in a warm place until the buns have doubled in volume, about 1 hour and 45 minutes. The buns are properly risen when they are puffy soft, doubled, and, in all likelihood, touching one another.

GETTING READY TO BAKE:

When the buns have almost fully risen, center a rack in the oven and preheat the oven to 375 degrees F.

Remove the sheet of wax paper and put the pan on a baking sheet lined with parchment or a silicone mat. Bake the sticky buns for about 30 minutes, or until they are puffed and gorgeously golden; the glaze will be bubbling away merrily. Pull the pan from the oven.

The sticky buns must be unmolded minutes after they come out of the oven. If you do not have a rimmed platter large enough to hold them, use a baking sheet lined with a silicone mat or buttered foil. Be careful – the glaze is super-hot and super-sticky.

SERVING:

The sticky buns are ready to serve when they have cooled down enough to be enjoyed without fear of burning fingers or tongue. While there is something very special about eating still-warm sticky buns, these are also really good at room temperature.

STORING:

Not surprisingly, these are best the day they are made, but, wrapped in plastic, they'll hold overnight. If you've kept the buns, you might want to reheat them briefly in a 350 degree F oven. While the baked buns cannot be frozen, you can freeze the filled and rolled log of dough or the cut buns – make certain they are wrapped airtight. Defrost the dough or rolls overnight in the refrigerator, then make the glaze, place the buns in the pan of glaze and let rise and bake as directed.