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'Light Rolls

Makes 15 rolls

Total Time: 1½ hours, plus 2 hours 50 minutes to 3 hours 50 minutes rising and cooling

Along the coast of North Carolina, light rolls are as iconic as biscuits are in the rest of the South. According to Liz Biro for Coastal Review, these rolls, also known as lightnin' (or loitin') rolls or sometimes just hot rolls, likely trace their roots to England, as they bear similarities to the Cornish splits of Cornwall. Typically these yeasted rolls are made without eggs and include a good amount of lard, which gives them a supple texture and savory flavor. While they're delicious straight out of the oven (especially with a schmear of butter), some people split them open and stuff them with country ham, fried chicken, or a fried pork chop for a more substantial breakfast. While the basic recipe is simple, you can find cooks in the area who fold in cheese or even make a cracklin' version, embedding fried pork skin into the dough. This take yields tender, salty-sweet rolls that are delicious on a breakfast table or as a snack. We suggest melting the lard on the stovetop. The dough will be sticky in step 3, but the hydration will make for supersoft rolls after baking. Brushing the baked rolls with melted butter gives them a shiny coating and rich flavor.

Ingredients

- 5 cups (25 ounces) all-purpose flour
- 2¼ teaspoons instant or rapid-rise yeast
- 2 teaspoons table salt
- 1½ cups whole milk, room temperature
- 8 tablespoons lard, melted
- 2 tablespoons sugar
- 2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

Directions

- 1 Whisk flour, yeast, and salt together in bowl of stand mixer. Whisk milk, melted lard, and sugar in 4-cup liquid measuring cup until sugar has dissolved.
- 2 Using dough hook on low speed, slowly add milk mixture to flour mixture and mix until cohesive dough starts to form and no dry flour remains, about 2 minutes, scraping down bowl as needed. Increase speed to medium-low and knead until dough is smooth and elastic and clears sides of bowl, about 5 minutes.
- 3 Transfer dough to lightly floured counter and knead by hand to form smooth, round ball, about 30 seconds. Place dough seam side down in lightly greased large bowl or container, cover with plastic wrap, and let rise until doubled in volume, 1½ to 2 hours.
- 4 Make foil sling for 13 by 9-inch baking pan by folding 2 long sheets of aluminum foil; first sheet should be 13 inches wide and second sheet should be 9 inches wide. Lay sheets of foil in pan perpendicular to each other, with extra foil hanging over edges of pan. Push foil into corners and up sides of pan, smoothing foil flush to pan, then spray foil with vegetable oil spray.
- 5 Press down on dough to deflate. Transfer dough to clean counter and divide into thirds. Cut each third into 5 equal pieces (about 3 ounces each) and cover loosely with plastic. Working with 1 piece of dough at a time (keep remaining pieces covered), form piece into rough ball by stretching dough around your thumb and pinching edges together so that top is smooth. Place ball seam side down on clean counter and, using your cupped hand, drag in small circles until dough feels taut and round. Repeat with remaining dough pieces.

6 Arrange dough balls seam side down into 5 rows of 3 balls in prepared pan and cover loosely with plastic. Let rolls rise until nearly doubled in size and dough springs back minimally when poked gently with your finger, 1 to 1½ hours. (Unrisen rolls can be refrigerated for at least 8 hours or up to 16 hours; let rolls sit at room temperature for 1 hour before baking.)

7 Adjust oven rack to lower-middle -position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Bake until golden brown and rolls register at least 195 degrees, 25 to 30 minutes, rotating pan halfway through baking. Brush rolls with melted butter and let cool in pan on wire rack for 3 minutes. Using foil overhang, transfer rolls to wire rack and let cool for 20 minutes. Serve warm or at room temperature.

Shaping Light Rolls

1 Form piece of dough into rough ball by stretching dough around your thumb and pinching edges together so that top is smooth.

2 Place ball seam side down on clean counter and, using your cupped hand, drag in small circles until dough feels taut and round.

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