



Xue Ren is the founder of Mantoulicious, cooking classes where the art of making creative steamed buns is imparted. She also owns and runs XR Baking Studios, a fully equipped baking studio located in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Xue Ren's skill and expertise in making steamed buns have made her the most highly sought-after cooking instructor in South East Asia. She travels frequently around the region to conduct cooking classes and the sessions are almost always oversubscribed. Xue Ren is often interviewed about her creations and she has been featured in major media publications and radio shows in Malaysia.

Before starting Mantoulicious and XR Baking Studios, Xue Ren honed her creative skills as a designer in the advertising industry for over 20 years. As a cooking instructor, she now brings together her flair for design with her love for making healthy, tasty treats to bring joy to others.

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Xue Ren

Mantoulicious

Creative & Yummy
Chinese Steamed Buns

For Review Only

Mantoulicious

Creative & Yummy
Chinese Steamed Buns

Gourmand
Cookbook
Award
WINNER



Xue Ren

@Mantoulicious



The first cookbook from
South East Asia's creative Chinese
steamed bun creator and instructor

Explains all you need to know
about making yummy and creative
Chinese steamed buns

Recipes are fully illustrated with
clearly written, easy-to-follow steps

Designs are categorised by level
of difficulty to guide home cooks to
master the basics before progressing
to more challenging recipes

Exciting collection of designs
that will brighten up any birthday
party or festive occasion

Includes bonus recipes for
a range of scrumptious fillings

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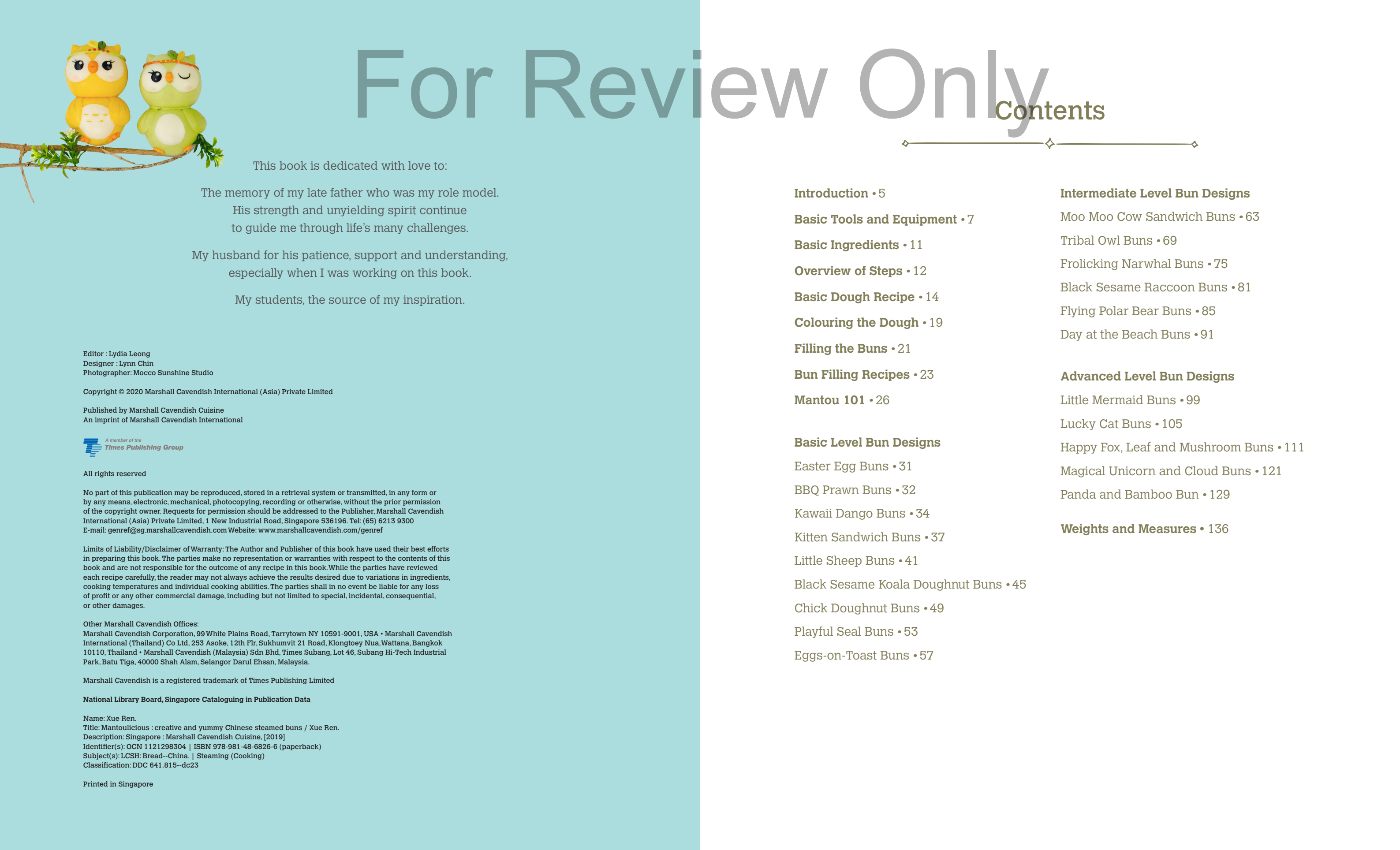
Mantoulicious

Creative & Yummy
Chinese Steamed Buns



Xue Ren

@Mantoulicious



For Review Only

Contents

This book is dedicated with love to:

The memory of my late father who was my role model.
His strength and unyielding spirit continue
to guide me through life's many challenges.

My husband for his patience, support and understanding,
especially when I was working on this book.

My students, the source of my inspiration.

Editor : Lydia Leong
Designer : Lynn Chin
Photographer: Mocco Sunshine Studio

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Published by Marshall Cavendish Cuisine
An imprint of Marshall Cavendish International



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National Library Board, Singapore Cataloguing in Publication Data

Name: Xue Ren.
Title: Mantoulicious : creative and yummy Chinese steamed buns / Xue Ren.
Description: Singapore : Marshall Cavendish Cuisine, [2019]
Identifier(s): OCN 1 121298304 | ISBN 978-981-48-6826-6 (paperback)
Subject(s): LCSH: Bread--China. | Steaming (Cooking)
Classification: DDC 641.815--dc23

Printed in Singapore

Introduction • 5

Basic Tools and Equipment • 7

Basic Ingredients • 11

Overview of Steps • 12

Basic Dough Recipe • 14

Colouring the Dough • 19

Filling the Buns • 21

Bun Filling Recipes • 23

Mantou 101 • 26

Basic Level Bun Designs

Easter Egg Buns • 31

BBQ Prawn Buns • 32

Kawaii Dango Buns • 34

Kitten Sandwich Buns • 37

Little Sheep Buns • 41

Black Sesame Koala Doughnut Buns • 45

Chick Doughnut Buns • 49

Playful Seal Buns • 53

Eggs-on-Toast Buns • 57

Intermediate Level Bun Designs

Moo Moo Cow Sandwich Buns • 63

Tribal Owl Buns • 69

Frolicking Narwhal Buns • 75

Black Sesame Raccoon Buns • 81

Flying Polar Bear Buns • 85

Day at the Beach Buns • 91

Advanced Level Bun Designs

Little Mermaid Buns • 99

Lucky Cat Buns • 105

Happy Fox, Leaf and Mushroom Buns • 111

Magical Unicorn and Cloud Buns • 121

Panda and Bamboo Bun • 129

Weights and Measures • 136

For Review Only

Introduction

I have always loved baking and I have many fond memories of the times I spent baking with my mother after school. Even after I started working as a designer in the advertising industry, I continued to experiment and hone my skills in baking. It was something I would make time for despite the long hours at work, because it was something I truly enjoyed doing.

Gradually, as I developed my skills as a designer, I also started to incorporate this sensitivity into my baking. It was then that I started working with Chinese steamed buns. But why Chinese steamed buns, you may ask. Firstly, the ingredients are readily available and inexpensive. Secondly, the malleable dough provided me with the perfect blank canvas to try out my ideas and express my creativity. As I spent time working with the dough, I also realised that it helped soothe me, making me more patient and focussed.

This collection of steamed bun designs has been carefully curated from my experience as a cooking instructor, to cater to home cooks of different skill levels. If you are new to making steamed buns and modelling dough, start with the Basic designs and master the techniques before moving on to the Intermediate and Advanced designs. I have included photos of every step to guide you through the process.

I know you will enjoy making these Chinese steamed buns as much as I do. And guess what? The fun doesn't end with steaming the buns. These creations are guaranteed to impress, and your family and loved ones will feel incredibly special when they are presented with them.

Enjoy!



For Review Only

Basic Tools and Equipment

This section details the list of basic kitchen equipment and tools that are useful for making Chinese steamed buns. Although it is convenient to have these items on hand, feel free to improvise.

Mixing Equipment



Bread Machine

Like the stand mixer, a bread machine can make the kneading process easier. If using a bread machine to knead the dough, make sure that the heating function is not turned on, as this could accelerate fermentation.



Stand Mixer

A stand mixer with a dough hook attachment can make the kneading process easier and help you achieve a smoother and more delicate dough than when kneading by hand. I would not recommend using a handheld mixer as it might not be powerful enough for kneading.

Steaming Equipment



Bamboo Steamer

A bamboo steamer is a good option as bamboo absorbs water, so there is no worry about condensation inside the steamer. The disadvantage, however, is that bamboo steamers tend to get mouldy if left damp. Avoid this by drying in the sun before storing.



Stainless Steel Steamer

A stainless steel steamer is easy to maintain and durable, but steam tends to collect on the lid and condensation can produce water droplets that drip onto the buns, leaving burn spots. To prevent this, wrap the lid with a cloth.

For Review Only

Modelling Tools



Cake Modelling Tools/ Fondant Decorating Tools

Dough can be shaped and moulded by hand, but these tools can make the job easier and faster. For example, a ball tool can be used to create indents for eyes and a blade tool can be used to shape hair etc.



Dough Scraper

Dough scrapers are useful for cutting dough into the required portions. I also use it for modelling and shaping dough. Both plastic and metal dough scrapers work well for this purpose.



Paint Brush

Fine tip watercolour paintbrushes are handy for applying small amounts of water for attaching fine details. Have at least two paintbrushes in your toolbox — one for applying moisture and the other for colouring. Choose good quality paintbrushes to avoid the hairs falling out and getting onto the buns.



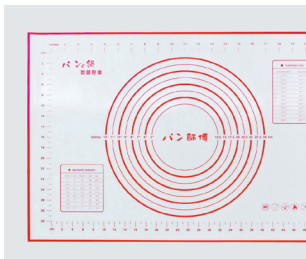
Rolling Pin

I use a Chinese rolling pin to shape and flatten the dough. Choose one that is about 25 cm long for the designs in this book. Both plastic and wooden rolling pins will work fine.



Toothpicks

Toothpicks with pointed tips are handy for picking up small bits of dough and creating fine details.



Silicone Baking Mat

These mats are great for kneading dough as they are non-stick. Choose a mat that comes with grid marks and guides, so you can roll the dough to size without needing a ruler.



Silicone Pastry Brush

A silicone pastry brush is useful for applying oil on buns, although my personal preference is to use my fingers!



Sugar Craft Cutter

Sugar craft cutters are ideal for creating decorative details quickly and easily. The cutters that I use most frequently in this book are flower and star cutters. Both plastic and metal cutters will work well.



Water Spray Bottle

A fine mist water spray bottle is useful for keeping the surface of the dough moist when attaching details. This is especially ideal when working in a dry or air-conditioned environment. Use room temperature drinking water in your spray bottle to avoid affecting the fermentation process.

Other Useful Tools



Digital Kitchen Scale

A digital kitchen scale is handy, especially when it comes to measuring small quantities of ingredients that are likely to lead to the success or failure of a recipe. Choose a scale that allows for 0.1-g increments for greater accuracy. A tare function is also useful.



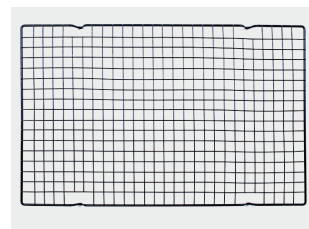
Timer

Whether you choose to use a mechanical or digital timer, having one will help you keep track of resting, proofing, kneading and steaming times. Although proofing times vary, I find that noting down the timing helps me gauge how long it will take on hot days, cool days or in an air-conditioned room, so I can better anticipate the process.



Lollipop Sticks

I use lollipop sticks as support for larger bun designs. These sticks are available in most baking specialty stores. For designs where you may need to leave the sticks in to steam with the buns, use food-safe bamboo sticks. Bear in mind to remove them before serving.



Wire Rack

Once the buns are done steaming, place them on a wire rack. This will allow them to cool more rapidly and help prevent condensation from accumulating and causing the buns to become soggy.



Parchment Paper

Also known as baking paper, parchment paper has a silicone coating, so food placed on it will not stick. It is also water-resistant and will not become soggy from steaming. Parchment paper is available in rolls, or ready-cut to size.



For Review Only

Basic Ingredients

You will need only a few key ingredients to make steamed buns. Feel free to experiment with different types of liquid, sugar, flour and fat/oil to find your preferred combination.

Liquid

Liquid helps form the gluten structure in dough. When heated, liquid converts to vapour, which causes the air cells to expand and increase the volume of the product. Liquid can also add flavour and nutrition to a product. The typical liquids used in making steamed buns are milk and water.

Full cream milk is a natural emulsifier that can make steamed buns whiter and help them stay softer for a longer period of time. Low-fat and skimmed milk can also be used, but the buns will not have the same keeping quality due to the lower fat content.

Non-dairy milk such as soy milk or nut milk are good alternatives, but the steamed buns may take on a yellowish hue and/or a mild bean/nutty aroma.

If using water, use filtered water as the minerals in tap water may suppress the vitality of the yeast.

Instant Dry Yeast

Yeast helps dough rise. In these recipes, I use instant dry yeast. This is because instant dry yeast is very stable and can be mixed directly with the other ingredients without first needing to be dissolved in water. Do not confuse instant dry yeast with active dry yeast which must be rehydrated in warm liquid before use. The quantity required will be different and substitution will affect the outcome of the recipe.

Sugar

Sugar plays several roles in the making of steamed buns. While it is optional as food for the yeast (since flour is sufficient), sugar adds flavour and is also moisture-absorbing. This hygroscopic property helps steamed buns maintain moisture and extend their keeping quality. Besides white castor sugar, golden castor sugar can also be used when making steamed buns.

Flour

Most recipes for steamed buns call for medium protein flour which gives the buns a fine and spongy texture. For buns with a softer texture, low protein flour can be used. Do note that each country and/or brand of flour has their individual standards of labelling and the percentages indicated below serve only as a reference.

Medium protein flour (9–11% protein) is milled from a combination of soft and hard wheats and offers just the right balance of strength and tenderness to make steamed buns. All-purpose flour and pau flour are examples of medium protein flour.

Low protein flour (7–9% protein) is milled from soft wheat and has a low gluten content. Hong Kong flour and cake flour are examples of low protein flour.

Fat/Oil

The role of fat/oil is to add moisture and tenderness to steamed buns, and my preference is to use softened unsalted butter. You may also use shortening or a mild-flavoured cooking oil like canola or corn oil. Do note that strong-flavoured oils like coconut or olive oil can also be used, but they will impart their aroma to the steamed buns.

Overview of Steps



This section provides an overview of the steps involved in making character steamed buns to give you a clear idea of the process. Read the recipe through several times to understand the process, then prepare the equipment and have the ingredients ready before you begin.

Mixing

The basic dough ingredients can be mixed together using a stand mixer or by hand, until a fine and smooth dough is achieved. If using a stand mixer, use the dough hook attachment and mix at medium speed for 10–15 minutes to achieve the desired result. The timing will depend on the power of the mixer.

If mixing by hand, knead for 8–12 minutes until the dough is fine and smooth. Note that this will depend on individual strength and skill. Add 1–2% more liquid to lighten the process.

Dividing

Divide the dough according to the instructions in the recipe and proceed to knead the portions individually. While working on a portion of dough, place the other portions under a bowl or cover with cling wrap to prevent drying out.

Kneading

Knead the dough by hand to make it even smoother and get rid of the air trapped in the dough during the mixing process. In order to achieve a fine texture and super-smooth surface in the final steamed product, this kneading process is essential.

Be careful not to knead the dough for too long as this will warm the dough and cause the final steamed bun to have a coarse texture.

Colouring

Colour the portions of dough as instructed in the recipe.

Shaping

Shape the portions of dough as instructed in the recipe before putting the parts together (modelling).

Modelling

This is a time-consuming process, and you will need to work quickly to keep the dough from becoming over proofed.

The rule of thumb is to work on the larger portions of dough first (such as heads and bodies), followed by the smaller details (such as whiskers, eyebrows and eyes), as larger portions of dough will require more time for proofing.

Proofing

One of the key steps in making a good steamed bun is to manage the proofing process since the degree of proofing will affect the texture and size of the final steamed bun. As temperature and humidity will affect the proofing time, however, it is not possible to set a fixed timing.

Optimum proofing time is largely determined through experience, by looking at and touching the rising dough pieces. When the dough is optimally fermented, it will have a shiny and rounded appearance, and feel light and springy when touched.

Refer to page 17 for ways to gauge when dough is optimally proofed.

Steaming

While the dough is proofing, prepare the steamer and bring the water to a boil. Place the buns in the steamer once they reach their optimal proofing time. Do not let the buns over proof.

Steam the buns for 10–12 minutes or according to the instructions in the recipe.

For Review Only

Basic Dough Recipe

Before you begin, read through the recipe several times and understand the steps. This will make the process smoother and enable you to achieve the best results.

makes about 250 g dough

- 75–82 ml (50–55%) cold milk
- 1.2–1.5 g (0.8–1%) instant dry yeast
- 15 g (10%) sugar
- 150 g (100%) medium protein flour
- 4 g (3%) softened unsalted butter

makes about 370 g dough

- 112–123 ml (50–55%) cold milk
- 1.8–2.2 g (0.8–1%) instant dry yeast
- 22 g (10%) sugar
- 225 g (100%) medium protein flour
- 6 g (3%) softened unsalted butter

Step 1: Mixing



1. Place the milk (75 ml or 112 ml) followed by the yeast, sugar, flour and butter in the bowl of a mixer fitted with a dough hook. Mix at low speed for 2 minutes until the dough comes together and there is no trace of flour at the bottom of the bowl.
2. Add more milk, if needed, until the dough comes together (see Note).
3. Continue to mix at medium speed for 10–12 minutes, until the dough is smooth and has a fine texture.

Note

Liquid absorption will vary with the type of flour used. Flour with a higher protein content will require more liquid to achieve the texture required.

Yeast thrives in warm conditions and is less active at cold temperatures. To give yourself more time to model the dough, use a cold liquid.

Use less yeast (0.8% rather than 1%) to lengthen the fermentation process and give yourself more time for modelling the buns.

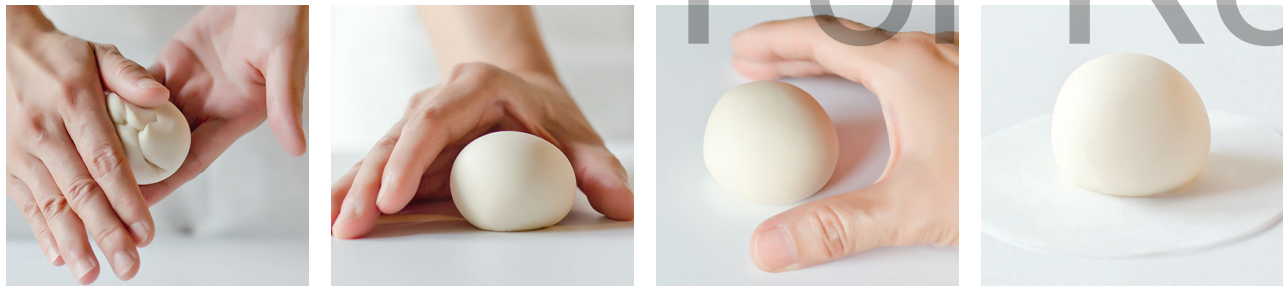
Step 2: Dividing and Kneading



4. Weigh and divide the dough into the required portions. Knead each portion of dough 2–3 times by rolling it on your worktop, then pressing it together. The kneaded dough should be pliable with a fine texture and glossy surface.

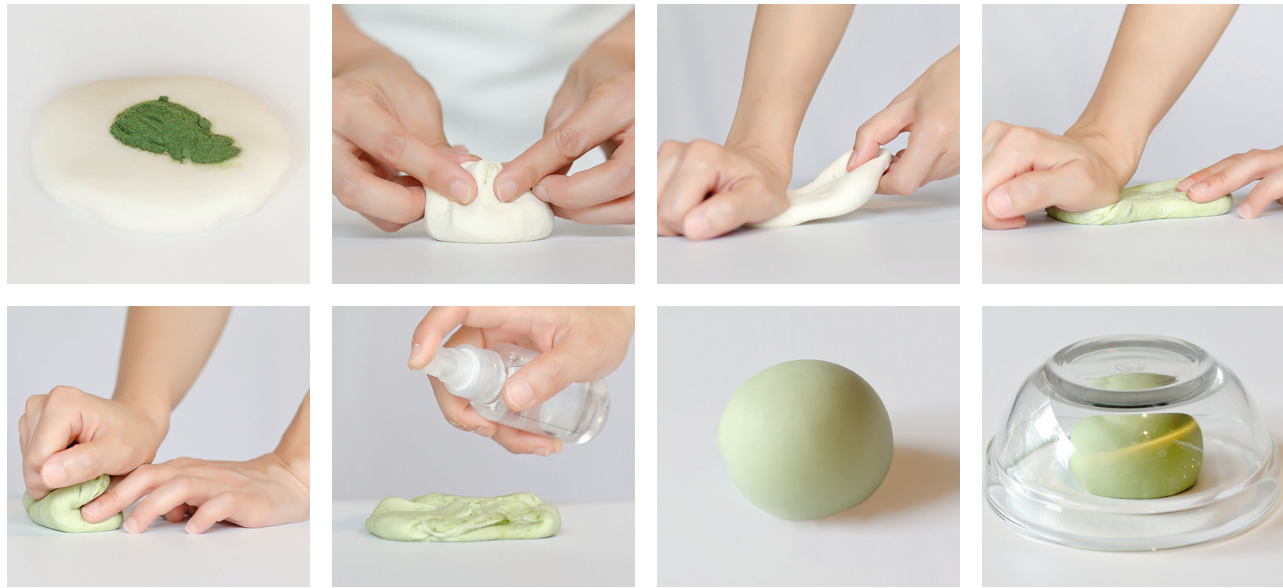


5. Knead the dough further by flattening it on your worktop. Tuck the edge into the middle, then press with your palm. Continue this tuck and press motion until a ball is formed. Flip the dough over and check that the surface is smooth.



- 6. Seal the seam with your purlicue, then roll the dough to tighten the surface and seam. Place the dough on a sheet of parchment paper. Repeat with the remaining portions.

Step 3: Colouring



- 7. Take the portion of dough to be coloured and flatten it slightly. Add the desired food colouring (see Colouring the Dough, page 19). Bring the sides of the dough up around the colouring and enclose, then knead the dough on your worktop until the colour is even.
- 8. Should the dough become dry while kneading, spray it with some water or milk and continue kneading.
- 9. Place the dough under a bowl or cover it with cling wrap to prevent it from drying out while you prepare the rest of the dough.
- 10. After the dough is coloured and shaped, set it aside for proofing.

For Review Only

Step 4: Proofing

- 11. Cover the dough with an overturned glass bowl or clear container and set it aside in a warm place to proof. As the time for proofing varies, here are several ways to check if the dough has been correctly or optimally proofed.



Viewing the Size
The dough should look larger in size and be rounded and airy.



Touching the Surface
The dough should feel soft and spring back slowly when the surface is touched.



Touching the Bottom
The bottom of the dough should feel hollow and airy. It should not spring back when touched. Use this method if you are working in an air-conditioned room, as the surface of the dough will tend to be drier and harder, making it difficult to judge if the fermentation is done.



Viewing the Volume
Place some dough into a small container and use a marker to indicate the level of the dough. Place it near the other portions of dough you are proofing. When the dough is double in volume, the proofing is done and the buns are ready to be steamed.

- 12. When the dough is approaching its optimum proofing time, prepare the steamer and bring the water to a boil. The water level in the steamer should be no more than 3–4 cm deep as excessive steam will ruin the look of the buns.

For Review Only

Step 5: Steaming



- 13. Arrange the buns in the steamer and replace the lid. Leave a gap to allow the steam to escape. I usually place a toothpick under the lid to create a small gap.
- 14. Steam over medium heat for 10–12 minutes, or until the buns are fully cooked. Start the timer only when you see steam escaping from the gap. The steaming time will depend on the size and quantity of the buns.
- 15. Turn off the heat and let the steamed buns rest in the steamer for 3 minutes.
- 16. Remove the buns and serve immediately or place on a wire rack to cool before storing.

Colouring the Dough

While there are many ways of colouring dough, including using fruit or vegetable purées, it is best to use food colouring powder or a concentrated food colouring gel/paste to avoid adding moisture, which will change the consistency of the dough and affect the outcome of the final product.

My preference is to use natural food colouring powder as you will only need a small amount to achieve the right colour tone. To colour the dough, add the powder gradually until the desired colour is reached.

For the colours to remain bright and vibrant, choose powders without anthocyanin. This is a naturally occurring pigment found in some plants, that can be destroyed at high temperatures or when the pH level changes. When this happens, the colour will lose its vibrancy. Note that anthocyanin is present in strawberry powders and roselle powders.

The chart on the following page shows the list of colouring powders that I use frequently. Adjust the amount added according to the size of the dough and the intensity of the colour you want to achieve. Bear in mind that some powders such as cocoa, matcha and black sesame will also alter the flavour of the steamed buns.

Gels or pastes are a good option only if they are thick and concentrated, and only a little is used. This is because the added moisture may cause the dough to become sticky and hard to work with.



For Review Only

Basic Level Bun Designs



If you're new to making steamed buns, start with the simple designs in this section. They involve fewer steps and will allow you to become familiar with the procedure before you attempt the more complex designs.



Easter Egg Buns • 31

BBQ Prawn Buns • 32

Kawaii Dango Buns • 34

Kitten Sandwich Buns • 37

Little Sheep Buns • 41

Black Sesame Koala Doughnut Buns • 45

Chick Doughnut Buns • 49

Playful Seal Buns • 53

Eggs-on-Toast Buns • 57



Easter Egg Buns

makes 6

Ingredients

- 250 g basic dough (page 14)
- Red yeast powder
- Turmeric powder
- Matcha powder
- Gardenia blue powder or butterfly pea flower powder
- Charcoal powder

Tools

- Dough scraper
- Small paintbrush

Dividing

- Divide the dough into six 35-g portions. Set the remaining dough aside.

Kneading

- Knead each portion of dough individually.

Xue Ren's Tip

While working on a portion of dough, keep the other portions covered to prevent the dough from drying out.

When adding water to the food colouring powders, add just a drop each time, until you achieve the right consistency. This will prevent the colouring from becoming too watery.



Modelling

- Roll each portion of dough into a teardrop shape. Sharpen one end. Use your thumb and index finger to shape it like an egg.
- Repeat for the other portions.

Colouring

- In a small bowl, mix a pinch of red yeast powder with a few drops of water. Repeat with the other food colouring powders.
- Use a paintbrush to draw patterns on the dough with the food colouring.

Proofing

- Set the buns aside to proof.

Steaming

- Steam the buns over medium heat for 8 minutes, then let them sit in the steamer for 3 minutes before opening the lid.

For Review Only

Intermediate Level Bun Designs



This section features slightly more complex bun designs compared to those in the Basic Level section. These designs are suitable for those who are already familiar with making steamed buns and want to try designs involving more colours and steps.



Moo Moo Cow Sandwich Buns • 63

Tribal Owl Buns • 69

Frolicking Narwhal Buns • 75

Black Sesame Raccoon Buns • 81

Flying Polar Bear Buns • 85

Day at the Beach Buns • 91



For Review Only

Frolicking Narwhal Buns

makes 4

Ingredients

- 250 g basic dough (page 14)
- Butterfly pea flower powder or gardenia blue powder
- Charcoal powder
- Matcha powder or gardenia green powder
- Turmeric powder or gardenia yellow powder
- Red yeast powder

Tools

- Dough scraper
- Small paintbrushes
- Blade tool
- Ball tool

Xue Ren's Tip

When attaching small details like the fins, horn and eyes, apply just a thin layer of water. The dough will not adhere firmly if too much water is used.

Position the fins slightly away from the bottom of the body to prevent them from curling under the body during steaming.

Dividing

- Divide the dough into one 188-g portion, one 9-g portion, three 4-g portions and one 1-g portion. Set the remaining dough aside.

Colouring

- Colour the 188-g portion of dough blue using butterfly pea flower powder or gardenia blue powder. Divide it into four 45-g portions. Set the remaining dough aside.
- Colour the 1-g portion of dough black using charcoal powder.
- Colour a 4-g portion of dough light green using a pinch of matcha powder or gardenia green powder.
- Colour another 4-g portion of dough light yellow using a pinch of turmeric powder or gardenia yellow powder.
- Colour the last 4-g portion of dough pink using red yeast powder.

Kneading

- Knead each portion of dough individually.

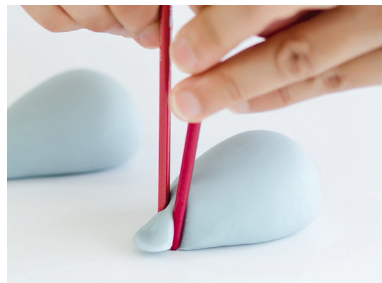


Modelling

Body

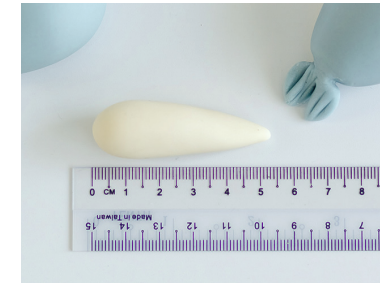
- Take a 45-g portion of blue dough. Roll it into a teardrop shape directly after kneading.
- Repeat for the other portions.

For Review Only



Tail

- Pinch and flatten the narrow end of the body to create a tail.
- Clamp the tail using the handles of 2 paintbrushes.
- Pinch the tail to flatten it.
- Use a blade tool to make a cut in the tail, then draw a few lines on the tail.
- Repeat for the other portions.



Belly

- Take a 9-g portion of plain dough. Roll it into a teardrop shape about 5.5 cm long.
- Place it between 2 sheets of parchment paper, then press down on it with a dough scraper to flatten it for the belly.
- Taper the edges by pressing with your fingers..
- Apply a thin layer of water on the belly and place the body on it. Gently press to attach the belly to the body, starting from the front and working your way to the back.
- Repeat for the other portions.



Flippers

- Take two 2-g portions of blue dough. Roll them into teardrop shapes.
- Gently flatten them, then use a blade tool to draw a few lines.
- Apply a thin layer of water on the flippers and attach them to the side of the body.
- Repeat for the other portions.



Eyes

- Take 2 soy bean-sized portions of plain dough. Roll them into balls, then flatten them for the white of the eyes.
- Apply a thin layer of water and place them on the face.
- Take 2 red bean-sized portions of black dough. Roll them into balls, then flatten them for the eyeballs.
- Apply a thin layer of water and place them on the white of the eyes.
- Repeat for the other portions.

For Review Only



Tusk

- Take 1 g each of light green dough, light yellow dough and pink dough. Roll them into long spindle shapes, then twist them together.
- Trim the two pointed ends. Apply a thin layer of water and attach one to each narwhal.
- Repeat for the other 2 portions.



Blowhole

- Take a red bean-sized portion of blue dough. Roll it into a ball, then use a ball tool to make a hole in the centre.
- Apply a thin layer of water and place it on top of a narwhal behind the tusk.
- Repeat for the other portions.



Blush

- Take 2 red bean-sized portions of pink dough. Roll them into ovals.
- Apply a thin layer of water and place them under the eyes.
- Repeat for the other portions.

Proofing

- Set the buns aside to proof.

Steaming

- Steam the buns over medium heat for 10–12 minutes, then let them sit in the steamer for 3 minutes before opening the lid.