GENERAL

paul hollywood bread buns and baking

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Introduction

There is a reason why the name **Paul Hollywood** has become synonymous with quality bread in the UK and beyond. From his early days in the bakery trade to his rise as a judge on the BBC's *Great British Bake Off*, Hollywood has always championed the idea that great bread starts with simple, honest ingredients and a clear, methodical approach. In this guide we'll dive deep into how you can recreate the iconic bread buns that Paul Hollywood is famous for, whether you're a seasoned baker or a home cooking enthusiast. We'll cover everything from the philosophy behind his techniques, to the exact ingredients, step by step instructions, and the tools that help bring his professional touch into your own kitchen.

Who is Paul Hollywood?

Paul Hollywood, born in 1967, began his career as a pastry chef before moving into bread baking, where he quickly made a name for himself as a master of yeast doughs. His reputation was cemented by his long running role as a judge on the BBC's *Great British Bake Off*, where his candid critiques and unwavering commitment to baking standards earned him both respect and affection from audiences worldwide. Hollywood's influence extends beyond television; his books, such as *Paul Hollywood's Bread* and *Paul Hollywood's Cakes*, provide practical, approachable guidance for bakers of all levels.

Paul Hollywood's Philosophy on Bread Baking

At the heart of Hollywood's approach is a belief that bread is an art form that should be accessible. He emphasizes the importance of:

- Ingredient quality – using high grade flour, natural yeast, and pure water.
- Patience – allowing dough to develop flavor through proper fermentation.
- Technique over gimmicks – mastering basic skills such as folding, shaping, and scoring.
- Consistency – maintaining the same process to achieve repeatable results.

These principles translate seamlessly into the creation of soft, flavorful buns that look like they've come straight from a professional bakery.

Why Buns Are a Perfect Starting Point

For many bakers, buns serve as an excellent training ground because they combine the fundamentals of bread making with a manageable size. The dough is easier to handle, the shaping process is straightforward, and the baking time is short enough to keep you engaged without feeling rushed. By mastering buns, you gain confidence that can be transferred to larger loaves, baguettes, or even intricate artisan shapes.

Essential Ingredients for Paul Hollywood Inspired Buns

- All purpose or bread flour – 500 /g (about 4 cups)
- Active dry yeast – 7 /g (1 packet)
- Fine sea salt – 10 /g (2 /tsp)

- Granulated sugar – 20 /g (1 /tsp)
- Unsalted butter – 30 /g (2 /Tbsp), softened
- Whole milk – 300 /ml (1 /¼ cups), warm
- Water – 30 /ml (2 /Tbsp), warm
- Optional: Egg yolk or milk for glazing, or herbs/spices for flavored buns

Step by Step Guide to Baking Paul Hollywood Style Bread Buns

Before you begin, ensure all ingredients are at room temperature. Warm the milk and water to about 40–43 /°C (104–110 °F) – this activates the yeast without killing it. Measure flour precisely; a kitchen scale is the most reliable method.

2. Mixing and Autolyse

In a large mixing bowl, combine the flour, salt, and sugar. Create a well in the center and pour in the warm milk and water. Mix until a shaggy dough forms. Let the dough rest for 20–30 minutes; this autolyse phase hydrates the flour, improves extensibility, and sets the stage for a smoother final product.

3. Bulk Fermentation

Sprinkle the yeast over the dough and add the softened butter. Knead on a lightly floured surface for about 10 minutes until the dough is elastic and slightly tacky. Place the dough back in the bowl, cover with a damp cloth, and let it rise at room temperature for 1.5–2 hours, or until doubled in volume. For richer flavor, you can refrigerate the dough overnight; this slow fermentation enhances aroma and texture.

4. Shaping the Buns

Divide the dough into 12 equal portions (about 70 g each). Gently shape each piece into a ball by folding the edges underneath and rolling it on the countertop. Place the shaped buns on a parchment lined tray, spacing them evenly to allow room for expansion.

5. Proofing

Cover the tray with a clean kitchen towel and allow the buns to proof for 45–60 minutes. The dough should rise noticeably but not double; you’re aiming for a light, airy crumb.

6. Baking

Preheat your oven to 220 °C (425 °F). If you’d like a glossy crust, whisk an egg yolk with a tablespoon of milk and brush it over the buns before baking. Place the tray in the oven and bake for 12–15 minutes, or until the tops are golden brown and the buns sound hollow when tapped on the bottom. For a darker crust, increase the temperature to 230 /°C (450 /°F) for the last 2–3 /minutes.

7. Cooling and Storing

Remove the buns from the oven and let them cool on a wire rack for at least 15 minutes. This step allows the crumb to set. Once cooled, store the buns in a paper bag at room temperature for up to 2 /days, or freeze for longer storage.

Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

- Over kneading – can make buns tough. Knead just enough to develop gluten.
- Insufficient proofing – leads to dense buns. Let the dough rise until it visibly puffs.
- Too much flour during shaping – can dry out the dough. Use minimal flour; pat the dough dry with a towel instead.

- Incorrect oven temperature – results in uneven crust. Use an oven thermometer for accuracy.
- Skipping the autolyse – hampers dough extensibility. Always give the dough a rest after the initial mix.

Advanced Variations: Flavored Buns & Artisan Techniques

If you're ready to step beyond the classic white bun, consider these variations:

- Whole grain buns – replace 25 /% of the flour with whole wheat or rye for added fiber.
- Herb infused buns – fold in chopped rosemary, thyme, or basil before the final shaping.
- Cheese buns – add shredded cheddar or parmesan to the dough during the bulk fermentation for a savory twist.
- Sweet buns – incorporate raisins, dried fruit, or a cinnamon sugar mix for a breakfast treat.
- Scoring & steam – for a professional crust, lightly score the tops before baking and add a shallow pan of hot water to the oven to create steam.

Tools and Equipment That Paul Hollywood Would Recommend

- Digital kitchen scale – for precise measurements.
- Mixing bowls – stainless steel or glass for durability.
- Bench scraper – to handle dough without over flouring.
- Proofing basket or bowl – to maintain shape during fermentation.
- Oven thermometer – to ensure accurate baking temperatures.
- Pastry brush – for glazing and oiling.
- Cooling rack – to allow proper airflow and crumb setting.

Tips for Achieving a Perfect Crust and Soft Interior

Balancing crust and crumb is the hallmark of a great bun. Here are some actionable tips:

- Use a Dutch oven or baking stone – retains heat and creates a steamy environment for a crisp crust.
- Apply steam at the start – a splash of water in the oven or a wet towel under the tray traps moisture.
- Brush with egg wash or milk – adds shine and a subtle flavor.
- Do not overbake – remove the buns as soon as they're golden; a slightly underdone crust can still be delicious.
- Let buns cool fully – this prevents condensation that can make the crust soggy.

Pairing Buns with Dishes and Savory Sides

Buns are incredibly versatile. Pair them with:

- Grilled meats or burgers for a hearty meal.
- Cheese platters and charcuterie for a sophisticated appetizer.
- Soup or stew as a comforting side.
- Sweet spreads like honey, jam, or Nutella for breakfast or dessert.
- Herbed butter or olive oil for a simple, elegant accompaniment.

FAQs About Paul Hollywood Bread Buns

- Can I use bread flour instead of all purpose flour? Yes, bread flour yields a chewier crumb and a better rise.
- What if I don't have active dry yeast? Substitute with instant yeast; reduce the amount by 25 /% and skip the autolyse.
- How long can I store fresh buns? Keep them in a paper bag at room temperature for up to 48 /hours;

refrigerate for longer freshness.

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