

ENGLISH MUFFIN VALENTINES

Topped with butter and jam, homemade English muffins are a real treat any day of the year—but these heart-shaped ones make a particularly unforgettable breakfast or snack to make and share on Valentine's Day.

INGREDIENTS

1 cup milk
3 tablespoons butter, cut into pieces
2 tablespoons honey
1 cup warm water (110° F/45° C)
1 package (1/4-ounce) active dry yeast
Cornmeal
5 1/2 to 6 cups all-purpose flour
1 teaspoon salt



1. Combine the milk, butter, and honey in a medium-size saucepan. Warm the mixture over medium-low heat until the butter starts to melt, then whisk it briefly. Remove the pan from the heat and allow the liquid to cool until lukewarm.

2. While the milk cools, pour the water into a medium-size mixing bowl and sprinkle the yeast over it. Stir the liquid gently with a fork. Set the bowl aside for 5 to 10 minutes, until all of the yeast has dissolved.

3. Line two baking sheets with waxed paper and sprinkle on a generous amount of cornmeal. (This is where you'll set the muffins to rise.)

4. Pour the cooled milk into the dissolved yeast and gently stir the mixture until well blended. Add 3 cups of flour and the salt to the liquid and beat the mixture vigorously with a wooden spoon until smooth (about 100 strokes). Beat in enough of the remaining flour, about 1/3 cup at a time, so that the dough is firm enough to knead and no longer sticky.

5. Scrape the dough from the bowl onto a floured surface. Dust the top of the dough with flour. Flour your hands as well, and knead the dough for 3 to 4 minutes. Let the dough rest for about 5 minutes.

6. Roll out the dough with a rolling pin, starting in the middle and pushing the pin from the center out, until the dough is a half inch thick.

7. Cut the dough into circles with a 3 1/2-inch biscuit cutter. Gather and reroll the scraps and cut out more circles (you should end up with 18). Now shape each circle into a heart: use a knife or scissors to cut a third of the way into the circle, round the cut side into the top of the heart, and then pinch the opposite side into a point for the tip.

8. Transfer the muffins to the prepared baking sheets, spacing them well apart. Sprinkle cornmeal on the tops. Cover the muffins with a dry, lightweight towel and let them rise until they are almost doubled in height—about 35 to 45 minutes.

9. When the muffins have risen, heat a large, heavy, ungreased skillet over medium heat. (If you have two skillets, you may want to prepare both so you can cook more muffins at once.) Or you can use an electric griddle heated to 300°. Carefully lift the muffins from the waxed paper and place them in the heated pan or griddle, spacing them an inch or so apart. You should be able to fit 4 or 5 muffins in each pan.

10. Cook the muffins for about 10 minutes on each side, using a spatula to flip them. You may have to adjust the heat if the muffins are browning too quickly or slowly. Transfer each batch of cooked muffins to a wire rack to cool before splitting and toasting them. Makes 1 1/2 dozen.