

Oatmeal Hermits

By Heritage Living editor Liz Harfull

This little-known recipe comes from a small cookbook published in 1937 to raise money for the Berry Street Foundling Hospital and Infant's Home in Melbourne. Now known simply as Berry Street, the organisation is still providing child and family services after almost 150 years. The charity was originally established in 1877 with funds raised by a group of women concerned about the plight of pregnant, unmarried girls, and the high mortality rate of their babies.

As well as recipes, *The Berry Street Foundling Home Infant Welfare and Cookery Book* shared wisdom on topics such as how a mother should look after her own health during pregnancy, and practical aspects of bathing and clothing babies. Oddly, given what we now know about the risks of consuming alcohol during pregnancy, it also contained three full pages of cocktail recipes, such as the Depression Eliminator—a heady, well-shaken mix of gin, brandy liqueur, orange juice and egg white!

Among the recipes is oatmeal hermits, something I had not heard of before discovering the cookbook as part of my research for *Tried Tested and True*. Now one of my favourite everyday baking recipes, oatmeal hermits are a comforting combination of rolled oats, dried fruit, walnuts, cinnamon and nutmeg. A roughly-formed small bun, a bit like rock buns, they are perfect served with a cuppa – not a cocktail!

Ingredients

200 g (2 cups) rolled oats

170 g (1 cup) dried fruit (raisins or sultanas), chopped

60 g (1/2 cup) chopped walnuts

150 g (2/3 cup) caster sugar

300 g (2 cups) self-raising flour

1 teaspoon ground cinnamon

1 teaspoon ground nutmeg

2 eggs

220 g butter, melted

1 teaspoon bicarbonate of soda

125 ml (1/2 cup) milk

Preheat the oven to 180°C (160°C fan-forced). Line a baking tray with baking paper.

Combine the oats, fruit, walnuts, sugar, flour, cinnamon and nutmeg in a large bowl

Lightly beat the eggs in a separate bowl, then stir in the melted butter.

Dissolve the bicarbonate of soda in the milk, then stir into the egg mixture. Add the egg mixture to the dry ingredients and stir with a wooden spoon or fork until combined.

Drop heaped dessertspoonfuls onto the baking tray, allowing room for spreading. Bake for 15 minutes, or until golden brown.

Allow the buns to cool slightly before moving them to a wire rack to cool completely.

Makes about 30 buns

Liz's tips

- Raisins are my preference for these buns; their flavour works well with the spices.
- Don't be tempted to skimp on the nutmeg—it is important to the flavour, and well balanced with the other ingredients.
- The buns should be quite rough on top, similar to a rock bun, so don't shape them when you drop the mixture onto the tray.
- They keep well for at least a few days, stored in an airtight container.

Signed copies of Tried Tested and True are available for purchase the author. For more information and to order visit lizharfull.com

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