Speķa Rauši (Bacon Buns)

Although the correct Latvian name for these little buns is ‘spekka rausi’, literally ‘bacon buns’, they are often called ‘piragi’. This word comes from the same Slavic root as ‘perogis’. My parents thought it important to use true Latvian terminology; therefore, I was taught ‘spekka rauši’.

The following is my mother’s recipe. Latvian ladies use different variations of this and are intensely competitive about their own versions of ‘spekka rausi’. The first question asked after a visit to another home is, “How do the ‘spekka rauši’ compare with mine?”

When Lia was a teenager, she and Keith attempted to replicate this recipe, with rather sparse instructions from my mother. Their filling was excellent; but, the bread dough was too hard.
Many years later Imogen (nine at the time) and I went to my mother’s to work with her in making these. I carefully measured and weighed (over objections that you should know the quantities by the ‘feel’). We had a successful day. Imogen shaped the buns quite beautifully. She was quite creative and shaped a number like Chinese buns, with knobs on the top.

My mother used the same dough (adding ½ cup sugar along with the coarse salt) for buns having a raisin or prune filling. She would also use this same dough for apple bread. She just rolled it out, crimped up the edges, and filled it with apple slices sprinkled with sugar and cinnamon). Another variation is to fill the bread with cottage cheese, sweetened and with lemon rind and raisins or peel added. Half a tsp or so of ground cardamom adds a nice flavour to sweet breads.

Dough
¾ cup lard
7 cups hot water
2 tbsp (0.1oz) coarse pickling salt
9 cups white, unbleached flour
1½ cups cold water
4 egg yolks
2 tbsp dried yeast
2 cups flour (white, unbleached)
Family Cook Book: Zelma

Glaze
½ cup strong tea mixed with 1 egg yolk

Filling
3 lb chopped bacon
3 large onions, finely chopped
1 tsp salt
freshly ground pepper

Dough
Put lard in a medium-sized pot. Add hot water from kettle. Place on stove element at medium heat and melt lard in water.
Put salt into a huge bowl and add water/lard mixture. Add flour, then cold water, then egg yolks.
Mix yeast well into 2 cups flour. Put your hand into the dough to test the temperature. It should be only slightly warm. If it is too hot, wait before adding the yeast mixture.
Knead vigorously for 15 minutes. If dough is sticky add more flour.
Test to determine that there has been enough kneading: Pull up a chunk of dough; cut it with a knife. If there are air bubbles, the dough is ready.
Sprinkle a handful of flour on the surface of the dough. Pat into a mound and mark with a cross. Cover with a tea towel and let rise at room temperature, in a draft-free place for 1 hour.

Filling
Fry bacon, drain, saving some fat in which you fry the onions until soft. Mix together and add the salt and pepper.

Assemble
Spray 4 cookie sheets with aerosol oil.
Roll dough to ¼”; cut circles with a glass. Put 1 rounded tsp. filling in the middle, fold and seal edges. Place buns on cookie sheets and place on oven for ½ hour.
Meanwhile, preheat the oven to 400 degrees F.

Bake for 20 minutes or until golden-brown. Put on tea-towels to cool.