

St. Lucia's Day is celebrated in Sweden on December 13 during the darkest days of winter. Martyred St. Lucia depicts the "bringer of light" at festivals throughout Europe – and Bishop Hill too! Here in Bishop Hill, during our two night festival, visitors are served sweet treats and coffee by young girls dressed as the saint. The celebration opens our Christmas season. Our Lucias wear white gowns and crowns of greenery with candles on their heads symbolizing the promise of the sun's return to the cold dark world.



In Swedish homes on Lucia's day, young girls of the family dress as St. Lucia and present their parents with breakfast in bed. That breakfast tray usually includes a pot of tea, some milk, and some St. Lucia Buns or Lussekatter (Lucia Cats). The yeasted saffron buns get their names from the whimsical shapes they take while being made: figure-eight shaped "cats," "S" shapes, for saffron.

SWEDISH LUCIA BUNS



INGREDIENTS:

- 1 cup melted butter
- 1/2 tsp. saffron threads, finely crumbled (or 1 tsp. powdered saffron)
- 1 cup milk
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 1 tsp. salt
- 2 pkg. dry active yeast (4 1/2 tsp.)
- 6 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 eggs, well-beaten, plus one egg white
- raisins or currants to decorate

Crumble saffron threads into melted butter. Let sit 30 minutes to an hour (this intensifies the saffron flavor). Heat milk to a light boil, turning off heat when it reaches the scalding point (with small bubbles across the top). Stir in melted butter, sugar, and salt. Pour mixture into mixing bowl and allow to cool until "finger-warm" (still quite warm, but just cool enough to touch). Stir in yeast and let sit for 10 minutes. Mix 3 1/2 cups flour into liquid. Stir in two well-beaten eggs. Add enough of the remaining flour to form a soft dough (just until the dough pulls away from the sides of the bowl. You don't want to add too much flour). Transfer dough to a large greased bowl and turn to coat all sides. Cover with a clean towel and allow to rise until doubled, about 1 hour. Punch down risen dough. Lightly knead two or three times on a floured surface. Pinch off small handfuls of dough (about the size of a racquetball) and roll into "snakes." Shape snakes into "S"-shaped buns or other desired shapes. Place on a lightly greased baking sheet, cover with the towel again, and allow to rise until doubled (about an hour). Decorate buns with raisins, brush with egg white, and bake in preheated 375° oven about 15 minutes, just until brown. Yield: 20 St. Lucia Buns ("Lussekatter")