

Lovely, Luscious Latkes

Of course, no one makes latkes like Momma. The grating, the making, the smells and the mess are what memories are made of: oil splattering, potatoes turning black, shredded skin in the batter, kitchen smoky, Momma frying a new batch of latkes while everyone in the other room eats them as fast as she can make them. Sodden, heavy, crispy, delicious, smothered with sour cream, sometimes smelling of *shmaltz*. Ah, those were the days! It's not clear that Momma's memories are quite as pleasant, but it is always good to have the family around, and so grate and fry she must, and does. Eat, eat, my children.

In consideration of those Mommas (and Poppas) who'd like to be out there eating crispy latkes with the rest of the family, the following recipe suggests how this can happen.

LATKES

(Makes about 28 potato pancakes, 2-3 inches each)

2 pounds russet (baking) potatoes, peeled and placed in a bowl of cold water
1/3 cup grated onion
2 eggs, lightly beaten (1 egg per pound of potatoes)*
1 cup all-purpose flour (best) or 1/2 cup matzah meal**
1 teaspoon salt, plus additional to taste
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
Peanut or canola oil for frying



1. Line a large baking sheet with paper towels. If not serving the latkes immediately—out of the frying pan into the dining room—preheat the oven to 200 degrees. Have a large bowl of cold water ready.
2. Grate the potatoes, using a hand grater or food processor fitted with the medium shredding disc. As potatoes are grated, transfer them to the bowl of water. When all of the potatoes are grated, set aside for 5 minutes. Drain the shredded potatoes in a large colander, rinsing with cold water. Transfer to a clean bowl.
3. Add the onion, the eggs, flour, salt, and pepper. Thoroughly combine the mixture.
4. In a large, preferably straight-sided pan, add oil to a depth of 1/4 to 1/3 inch.
5. Form pancakes, using 2 tablespoons from a regular silverware set. Scoop up a generous spoonful of the potato mixture with one spoon, flatten the mixture with the other spoon. Slide the latke into the oil. Repeat until the pan is full, but not crowded. Cook the latkes until browned at the edges. Turn the latkes over and cook until fully browned. Transfer the finished latkes to the lined baking sheet to drain excess oil. Repeat with the remaining mixture.
6. If not serving the latkes immediately, transfer the sheet to the preheated oven to keep warm. If serving even later, set the latkes aside to cool to room temperature, then freeze until ready to serve. Reheat the latkes in a 350-degree oven, and drain again on paper towels because reheating will release more oil.
Serve with sour cream or applesauce. Add salt to taste.

Hamantashen Fit for an Ex-Queen

As the Latke-Hamantash Debate demonstrates, even those who fight together for the honor of the hamantash can come to blows over the matter of the best filling. The traditionalists (conservatives?) look askance at anything but poppy seed or prune, and argue over which of these is the most destined for this delicate pastry. Others prefer cherry, apricot, or apple, but even these innovations are rejected by the modern *apikoros*, the child raised in America who sees chocolate as the only possible substance that should be stuffed inside the hamantash.

And then there is the other eternal question: cake or cookie dough? On the Web today one can find countless combinations of dough and filling, and the problem is compounded: which is the true hamantash? How elusive reality, how enduring the quest to understand the Divine plan!

Ex-Queen Vashti, who walked away from a life of ease in the palace of Shushan, Persia, long ago, thereby paving the way for Esther's ascendancy and the salvation of the Jews, reminds us of what is important in life, aside from hamantashen. Vashti refused to be degraded and disgraced by parading around like a Persian Miss America before her husband's drunken friends, and maintained her dignity and independence in the face of male oppression. In honor of this early feminist, Robin Leidner, University of Pennsylvania, offers her special Liberation Hamantashen.

LIBERATION HAMANTASHEN

(Makes about 24)

3/4 cup sugar
2 cups sifted flour
2 teaspoons baking powder
1/4 teaspoon salt
1/2 cup shortening
1 egg, beaten
2 tablespoons orange juice
1 17-ounce jar prune butter (*lekvar*). Can also use poppy seeds (*mohn*), apricot filling, or cherry pie filling.



1. Sift the sugar, flour, baking powder, and salt into a bowl. Work in the shortening by hand. Add the egg and orange juice, mixing until dough is formed. Chill overnight if possible, or at least two hours.
2. Roll out the dough about 1/8 inch thick on a lightly floured board. Cut into 3-inch circles (a teacup works). Place one heaping teaspoonful of the filling in each. Pinch three edges of the dough together (use a knife or spatula to lift the edges), but leave a small opening in the center; the resulting pastry will be in the shape of a triangle with a little of the filling showing. Place on a greased cookie sheet. Cover with a cloth and set aside for 1/2 hour.
3. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Baste hamantashen with beaten egg for a shinier crust, if desired. Bake hamantashen for about 20 minutes, or until delicately browned on top.