

Latkes

It might be hard to believe that mere potato pancakes can symbolize the hardships and strife that the Jews have endured. These potato pancakes (called latkes) are meant to symbolize the miracle of Hanukkah, when the oil of the menorah in the ransacked Second Temple of Jerusalem was able to stay aflame for eight days even though there was only enough oil for one day. The symbolism comes in the form of the oil in which latkes are fried. Over a thousand years later, this miracle is still being celebrated by Jews across the world. Making latkes is one way in which Hanukkah is celebrated. Latkes are typically eaten dipped in sour cream or applesauce.

Notes: Use Russet potatoes, or baking potatoes, because they are high in starch and have a dry, mealy texture. This type of potato is best for latkes because the dryness of the potato is partially responsible for that desirable, crispy texture.

Chicken schmaltz or rendered chicken fat is a staple of traditional Jewish cooking. The flavor is delicate and supremely savory and can help you make truly special latkes. Chicken schmaltz can be found at a kosher butcher or online.

Ingredients

3 lbs. Russet potatoes
1 medium yellow onion
2 eggs
2 teaspoons salt
¼ teaspoon black pepper
4 Tablespoons dried breadcrumbs, panko or matzo meal
Equal parts oil and chicken schmaltz
Sour cream
Apple sauce

Cooking Utensils

Knife and cutting board
Measuring cup
Measuring spoons
2 mixing bowls
Wooden spoon
Fork
10" frying pan
Fish spatula
2 rimmed baking sheets
Wire rack
Paper towels
Cheesecloth or clean, thin kitchen towel
Food processor with shredding blade **or** box grater

Preheat the oven to 200°. Line 1 rimmed baking sheet with a double layer of paper towels. Fit a wire rack onto a second baking sheet. Wash the potatoes well, but do not peel them. Cut each potato in half crosswise. Peel the onion. Using the food processor, or the box grater, grate the potatoes and the onion.

Transfer the grated potato and onion onto a large triple layer of cheesecloth. Gather up the corners and tie them around the handle of a wooden spoon. Hang the bundle over a large bowl, then twist and squeeze the potatoes and onion as hard as you can until no more liquid comes out. You should do this in at least 2 batches. Let the liquid sit for a few minutes to allow the potato starch to settle. Pour off and discard the liquid but keep the potato starch.

Place the potatoes, onion, eggs, dried breadcrumbs, panko or matzo meal, potato starch, salt, and black pepper into a large mixing bowl. Mix with your fingers, making sure that the potato starch breaks up and is evenly distributed with the rest of the ingredients. Let sit for 10 minutes.

Place 1 cup of the oil and chicken schmaltz (if using) into the frying pan. The oil and schmaltz should be about 1/4-inch deep when melted. Heat over medium-high heat until a piece of the latke mixture dropped into the oil sizzles immediately.

Scoop 1/4 cup of the latke mixture onto a fish or flat spatula. Flatten with your fingers to a 4-inch patty. Slide the latke into the hot oil, using a fork to nudge the latke into the pan. Repeat until the pan is full but the latkes aren't crowded. Cook until deeply golden-brown, 4 to 5 minutes per side, adjusting the heat as needed. Using the fish spatula, transfer the latkes to the paper towel-lined baking sheet to drain for 2 minutes. Serve immediately with applesauce and sour cream or transfer the latkes to the wire rack and keep warm in the oven for up to 30 minutes while you continue frying the remaining latkes.