

Polish/Russian cheese latkes (syrniki)

Recipe by Vered Guttman

Syrniki are popular in Russia and Poland, mainly as breakfast treats, much like pancakes. Traditionally, the dish is made with either German style Quark cheese, Russian tvorog or Polish twaróg cheese that is very similar to farmers' cheese. You can find tvorog and twaróg in Eastern European supermarkets, or you can use Israeli Gvina Levana (quark), farmers' cheese, or strained ricotta to reduce its water content, as I do in the recipe below.

Ingredients

1 lb. ricotta cheese, farmers' cheese, or tvorog (see note above)
½ cup flour
2 eggs, lightly beaten
2 tablespoons sugar
1 teaspoon kosher salt
4 tablespoons olive oil (you can substitute half with butter)
Powdered sugar for serving
Cherries in syrup or cherry preserves for serving
Sour cream for serving (optional)



Directions

1. Skip this step if you're using farmers' cheese or tvorog, or if the ricotta you're using seem not too wet. Set a fine sieve or folded cheesecloth set inside a colander over a bowl and spoon ricotta into sieve. Let stand at room temperature for 1-2 hours to remove access water.
2. Put the strained ricotta, farmers' cheese or tvorog in a bowl of a stand mixer fitted with a flat beater. Add flour, eggs, sugar and salt and mix on medium speed to create a smooth batter. Don't over mix. Remove from mixer, cover bowl in plastic, and let chill in the fridge for 1 hour, and up to 4 hours.
3. Line a baking sheet with two layers of paper towels.
4. Heat a little oil or butter in a non-stick pan over medium heat. When oil is hot, gently spoon a spoonful of the batter into the pan, patting it gently to a round shape. Fry until golden, about 2 minutes per side. Transfer to paper towel lined sheet. Wipe pan clean with a paper towel, add more oil as needed and continue with the rest of the batter.
5. Serve immediately or at room temperature. Sprinkle latkes with powdered sugar and serve with a side of cherries in syrup or cherry preserves and sour cream.

Hanukkah: The Festival of Cheese with Vered Guttman

Ukrainian pampushki

Recipe by Vered Guttman

Pampushki (or pampushkes in Yiddish) are fried stuffed potato balls filled with cheese and chive. It's like taking potato latkes to the next level.

Serve with sour cream on top.

Yields about 15 pampushki

Ingredients

- 1 lb. russet potato
- 1 cup mashed potatoes (preferably russet)
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt
- ½ teaspoon ground black pepper
- 6 oz. feta
- 3 tablespoons chopped chive
- 1 egg, lightly beaten
- ¾ cup breadcrumbs
- Corn oil, olive oil or avocado oil for frying
- Sour cream, for serving



Directions

1. Using a coarse grater, grate potatoes and transfer to a medium bowl. Add mashed potato, salt and pepper and mix.
2. In a separate small bowl, mix feta and chive. In another small bowl, mix beaten egg with a tablespoon water, and put the breadcrumbs in another bowl. Line a tray with parchment paper. Line a second tray with paper towels.
3. Use your hands to form a 1½ inch ball of the potato mix. With your index finger or thumb, create a small well in the ball and fill in with feta, then seal back the ball. Roll it in your hands for a nice round shape, Dip in the egg wash, then in the breadcrumbs, and put on the tray. Repeat with the rest of the mashed potato mix.
4. Fill a frying pan with about 1 inch of oil and heat on medium heat until it reaches 325 degrees (cover the pan to expedite the process of heating. It will take about 10-12 minutes). If you don't have a food thermometer, test the heat with a small piece of mashed potato mix, the oil should just simmer gently around it.
5. Fry half the pampushki on low simmer for 8-10 minutes, until fully cooked and golden-brown in color. If pampushki brown too quickly, reduce the heat. Transfer fried pampushki to paper towel lined tray and repeat with the rest. Serve immediately with a dollop of sour cream.

MOMENT MAGAZINE ZOOMINAR

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Moroccan sfenj doughnuts

Recipe by Vered Guttman

The sfenj originated from Muslim Spain and is now popular in the Maghreb. The word “sfenj”, similarly to the Hebrew word for doughnuts “soufganiya”, likely comes from the Greek word for sponge “sponges”.

Here’s the recipe to this modest mother-of-all-soufganiyot.

SAF Instant yeast is available online and is superior to the wide-spread supermarket active dry yeast. If you’re baking a lot, it’s worth ordering Instant yeast and keep it in the fridge for months. Otherwise, use 1 tablespoon plus ½ teaspoons active dry yeast (instead of the 1 tablespoon instant yeast.)



Yields about 16 sfenj

Ingredients

3 cups all purpose flour
1 tablespoon instant yeast (see note above)
2 tablespoon sugar, plus more for dipping
1 tablespoon whiskey
1¾ cups warm water
1 teaspoon salt
Corn oil or mild olive oil or avocado oil for frying

Directions

1. In a bowl of a stand mixer fitted with dough hook, put flour, yeast and sugar and mix for with a spatula. Make a well in the center and pour whiskey, water and salt in, then knead for 4-5 minutes. The dough will be very sticky, but don’t be tempted to add more flour to it.
2. Transfer dough to a lightly greased large bowl, cover with plastic wrap and let stand for an hour or until dough doubles in volume. Pinch dough to deflate it, then let rise again for another hour. Some may even repeat this process for a third time.
3. Fill a deep frying pan with ¾ inch oil, cover, and bring to 325 degrees over medium heat (this may take about 10 minutes.) Test oil temperature by dropping a piece of dough into it. The oil should simmer gently around it.
4. Line a large tray with double layers paper towels.
5. Grease your hands with a little oil. Take a piece of dough the size of ping pong ball, roll it to a ball then use your fingers to shape it like a ring-shaped doughnut, and gently drop it into the oil. Repeat with three more sfenj. Use a tablespoon to drop hot oil on the upper side of each sfenj, and when the bottom is golden, flip it over and cook the other side until golden. Traditionally, a wooden skewer is used to flip the sfenj. When the sfenj is ready, transfer to a tray and continue with the rest of the dough.
6. Put ½ cup sugar in a medium bowl and deep each sfenj in sugar to coat both sides. Arrange in a serving platter and serve immediately.

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