

NORWEGIAN WRAPPING BREAD (LEFSE)

from the book *Flatbreads and Flavors: A Baker's Atlas*
by Jeffrey Alford and Naomi Duguid

Our friend Judy is from Minnesota, from a family of Norwegian extraction. Whenever she talks of lefse, she gets a dreamy, faraway look in her eye. One day she called to say that she'd received a shipment of lefse in the mail from her Aunt Effie. She arrived at the door ten minutes later and we feasted on it, in the traditional way – spread with fresh sweet butter and lightly sprinkled with sugar, then rolled up. We washed our excesses down with strong coffee.

Lefse is indeed a great treat, one Judy particularly associates with Christmas and other festive occasions. Every region, every family, seems to have a preferred style: Some are fine and supple, rich with butter and cream, and soft with cooked mashed potato; others are made only with potato, flour, and water. Judy also describes another traditional way of eating lefse, wrapped around slices of smoked meat or cheese and meat combinations, like a rolled-up sandwich.

Lefse are easier to roll out if the dough is made a day ahead and refrigerated overnight, as described below. They need an even heat, so an electric frying pan (or a lefse maker) is ideal, but a heavy well-seasoned cast iron skillet will do. The rolling pin commonly used for lefse has fine grooves in it to help prevent the dough from sticking to the pin as you roll. We manage without a grooved pin, using instead a very small lightweight wooden pin and keeping it well floured.

Though it is tempting to knead the dough, try to resist, for kneading produces a tougher lefse than tradition finds acceptable, though still soft and of course somewhat easier to roll out.

2 pounds old or mealy potatoes, peeled and coarsely chopped (about 4 cups)

1/3-cup soft unsalted butter

1/2cup heavy cream

1½teaspoons salt

Approximately 2 cups unbleached all-purpose flour, plus extra for rolling

You will need a large pot, a large bowl, a rolling pin, a potato masher, and an electric frying pan or lefse maker or a large cast iron skillet.

The day before you wish to serve lefse, prepare the dough:

Place the potatoes in a large pot and add water just to cover. Bring to a boil and cook until soft. Drain, and mash thoroughly; there must be no small lumps to interfere with rolling out the breads. (We're told that many lefse makers now use instant mashed or flaked potatoes because of the need to have the potatoes absolutely smooth and lump-free.)

Transfer the potatoes to a bowl. Stir in butter, cream, and salt, and blend well. Add flour and work the dough into a ball; **DO NOT KNEAD**. If the dough feels very sticky, add a little more flour; potatoes vary in moisture content, so the amount of flour you need to make a workable dough will vary. Cover and refrigerate overnight, well sealed in plastic wrap.

Turn the dough out onto a well-floured surface. Divide in two, and set one half aside, covered with plastic wrap. (You can also wrap the dough in plastic wrap and store it in the refrigerator for up to five days.)

Divide the piece of dough into sixteen equal pieces. (This will yield lefse slightly smaller than those made by Judy's Aunt Effie, and therefore easier to handle and to cook evenly in a skillet.) Keeping your hands and work surface lightly floured, flatten one piece of dough with the palm of your hand, turning it over once or twice as you do so. Using a light touch and a rolling pin, roll the dough out, rolling from the center outward and rotating it an eighth- to a quarter-turn between each stroke, to a very thin round, 8 to 10 inches across. Turn the dough over occasionally and keep your work surface and rolling pin very lightly floured to prevent sticking. Slide the bread to one side of your work surface and start rolling out the next one.

At first you may wish to roll out eight breads and cook them before you start rolling out the others. As you develop a rhythm, you will be able to roll out breads while you cook. Remember as you roll them out that even slightly-thicker-than-perfection lefse will still look and taste wonderful.

Heat an electric frying pan to 350 degrees or heat a lefse maker or large cast-iron skillet over medium-high heat. When the pan is hot, transfer a rolled-out bread to the pan and cook for 45 seconds to 1 minute, or until lightly speckled with gold, but not brown. Turn over and cook the other side. (The butter in the dough will keep it from sticking.) Lift the bread out gently and transfer to a plate. Continue cooking the rolled-out breads, then roll out and cook the remaining dough. If you plan on storing the lefse in the refrigerator, place a sheet of waxed paper between each, since they tend to stick to each other when cooled. In our house they are devoured almost as they are made, so we don't bother with the waxed paper. You can store them for several days on a plate, well wrapped in plastic wrap, at room temperature, or for up to two weeks in the refrigerator; reheat in a dry medium-hot skillet just before eating.

<Makes 32 thin, supple round breads, 8 to 10 inches in diameter.>

Serve with granulated sugar or honey or homemade berry jam for breakfast, a late afternoon snack, or for dessert. Sprinkle each bread lightly with sugar, or brush with honey or jam, and roll it up neatly before eating. A friend raised on English pancakes suggested we try a squeeze of lemon on the sugared bread before rolling it up – delicious, if untraditional. Lefse also make a great addition to a smorgasbord (see page 348) as a sweet course, accompanied by fresh berries and strong coffee.



Grilling, rolling, and preparing dough



Transferring lefse to the grill



Flipping to bake side 2

Photos by Terry's Lefse Links (www.geocities.com/tstoalefse.html)

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