



POTATO LATKES

Makes about 24; serves 6 to 8

The word “latke” means “little oily thing” in Yiddish, which is just one aspect of this delicious and crisp potato pancake. Fried foods symbolize the Hanukkah miracle of the oil for the menorah lasting eight days. Latkes evolved from Italian savory pancakes and ricotta cheese pancakes cooked in oil olive. Ashkenazi Jews originally ate latkes (levivot in modern Hebrew) made from vegetables or rye or buckwheat flour cooked in goose or chicken fat. With the arrival of the New World potato, an enduring tradition was begun. For a taste of the past, fry the latkes in chicken fat (schmaltz) or duck fat.

Serve the latkes by themselves with applesauce and/or sour cream sprinkled with green onions or herbs, or serve plain as an accompaniment to saucy dishes such as Pulled Turkey with Pomegranate Molasses (page 65) or one of the brisket or pot roast recipes (see pages 38, 73, or 114). Try them topped with salsa, Z’hug (page 213), or even amba (see page 135) or Yellow Curry Sauce (page 211) or purchased mango chutney.

Some families have a tradition of sprinkling plain latkes with sugar. I think they would also be good drizzled with Pomegranate Molasses (page 212) or silan (see page 25), topped with hummus, or crowned with fried eggs.

2½ pounds Idaho, russet, or Yukon gold potatoes
1 large onion, cut into large chunks
1 teaspoon minced garlic
3 large eggs, beaten
1 teaspoon salt
¼ teaspoon ground black pepper
3 tablespoons flour or ¼ cup matzo meal
Vegetable oil for frying

Hannukah foods

Two types of foods dominate Hanukkah tables, those fried in oil and those made with dairy products. The dairy connection dates back to a fourteenth-century interpretation of the story of Judith and involves her feeding an enemy general salty cheese until he was thirsty then plying him with wine. Once he passed out, Judith cut off his head. The story is no longer associated with Hanukkah but dairy foods are.

Set a wire rack over a pan or line two plates with paper towels.

Scrub the potatoes well or peel them. Using a food processor fitted with the grating attachment, grate the potatoes, alternating with chunks of onions, emptying the work bowl as necessary into a large bowl. (The onions will help keep the potatoes from browning, but if the potatoes do end up turning brown, they will taste just as good.) If grating with a hand grater, combine the batches in a large bowl.

Working over a sink or second bowl, take handfuls of the potatoes and onions and squeeze out as much liquid as you can. Place the wrung-out potatoes and onions in a large dry bowl. Repeat with the remaining shreds.

Change to the food processor's steel blade. Put $\frac{1}{3}$ of the potato back in the work bowl and pulse until finely chopped. (If making by hand, chop with a knife.)

Add the chopped potato and onions to the bowl with the shreds. Add the garlic, eggs, salt, and pepper. Sprinkle the flour on top and mix well. Let rest for 10 minutes. Sprinkle in more flour if the batter seems wet and doesn't stick together when compressed. Stir well.

Heat a 10- to 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat. Add $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch oil. Take 3 to 4 tablespoons of batter and, working over a bowl (not the latke batter bowl) to catch drips, squeeze the batter with your hands to form a compact patty $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 inches in diameter.

When the oil is hot but not smoking (a shred of potato tossed into the hot oil should sizzle on contact, about 350°F on a deep fry thermometer), use a spatula to gently slide the first 3 to 5 latkes into the pan. Do not crowd them. Adjust the heat as necessary. Press down to flatten with a spatula.

Fry for about 4 minutes until the center of the latke has become firmer, the edges have browned, a spatula can easily be inserted underneath without tearing the latkes, and the bottom is golden brown. Flip it over and cooked until the other side is browned, 3 to 4 minutes. (If a latke falls apart during the flip, use the spatula to pat it back in shape.)

Drain on the prepared rack. Bring the oil back to sizzling and repeat until all the latkes are cooked. If you need to add oil between batches, make sure the oil is sizzling again before cooking.

VARIATION: *Make It Vegan*—Omit the eggs and increase the flour or matzo meal by 1 tablespoon or use an egg replacer.

VARIATION: *Make It Gluten-Free*—Replace the flour or matzo meal with potato starch (not potato flour) or one-for-one all-purpose gluten-free flour baking mix.

MAKE IT IN ADVANCE: *The latkes can be cooled, wrapped, and refrigerated overnight or wrapped individually and frozen for up to 3 months.*