



## My Mother's Potato Pancakes (Latkes)

By Lisa Schroeder

Makes 6 to 8 servings

I always wanted Mother's Bistro to be a place where people could come to celebrate holidays with traditional foods. That's why we make turkey for Thanksgiving, hot cross buns for Easter, and potato pancakes for Hanukah. Most of my holiday recipes come from my mother and this one is no exception. I honored my mother as a Mother of the Month when I first opened my restaurant (even though she passed away many years ago, when I was 21), because it's very clear I owe my culinary talents to her. (See her story, below) The key to light, crispy potato pancakes is not scrimping on the oil (**follow the recipe!**) and squeezing out as much liquid as possible from the grated potatoes and onions before mixing them with the eggs and flour. Don't rinse the grated potatoes – their natural starch helps hold the pancakes together.

2 pounds potatoes (any kind will do, but russets work great)  
1 large yellow onion  
2 eggs  
¼ cup unbleached all-purpose flour or matzoh meal (see Love Note below)  
1 tablespoon salt  
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper  
½ cup (about) vegetable oil, for frying  
Applesauce (recipe follows)  
Sour cream

1. Preheat oven to 250°F. Peel the potatoes and onion. Grate them using the fine grater attachment on your food processor, or grate by hand with the large holes on a box grater.
2. Transfer grated potatoes and onions to a colander. Press and squeeze to extract and discard as much liquid as possible.
3. Beat the eggs in a large mixing bowl. Add the grated and squeezed potatoes and onions, flour, salt and pepper. Toss gently with your hands to mix well.
4. Preheat the oven to 250°F. Place a large (12- to 14-inch) sauté pan over high heat for several minutes. When hot, add oil to a depth of ¼ inch. Heat oil until shimmering.
5. Working in batches, measure ¼-cup scoops of the potato mixture into the oil (**be careful you don't splash oil when dropping the batter**), leaving enough room between them to turn the pancakes. (**You can measure the first one so you get an idea of how large they should be, and then use a large spoon for the rest, or use a 2-ounce ice cream scoop.**) Flatten each pancake with a flat metal spatula so they aren't too thick and will cook evenly.
6. Fry the pancakes one side until golden brown, about 3 minutes, turn with a slotted spatula and fry on the other side for another 3 minutes (**lower the heat to medium if they are browning too fast -- before they have a chance to cook thoroughly**). Transfer pancakes to a paper-towel-lined baking sheet to drain and place in the oven to keep warm (**but don't stack them or they'll be soggy**). Repeat with the remaining batter, adding more oil if necessary between batches. (If freezing for later use, undercook them a bit so they don't get too dark when reheated and don't bother putting them in the oven. Let the pancakes cool before wrapping in plastic and freezing in zip-top freezer bags. Defrost, then reheat in a 350°F oven for about 15 minutes).
7. Serve with applesauce and sour cream.



### **Love Note**

Matzoh meal is made of ground matzoh, an unleavened, cracker-like bread eaten during Passover and common in Jewish cooking. Look for it on the kosher foods aisle.

### **Applesauce**

Makes about 2 cups

4 apples, peeled, seeded and diced (about 2 pounds; Love Note)

½ cup water or apple juice

¼ cup granulated sugar

1 (1-inch) piece cinnamon stick

1. Peel the apples. Stand the apple upright and cut all four sides off, as close to the stem as possible without actually cutting through the stem. (You'll lose a tad of apple, but this way, you are coring and cutting the apple at the same time. Give the cores to the kids to gnaw on while you finish the latkes.) Roughly cut apples into large chunks.
2. Place apples in a medium saucepan. Add water or juice, plus the sugar and cinnamon stick. Cover and cook over medium heat, until apples are soft (they should feel mushy), about 15 to 20 minutes. (Check the apples halfway through. If the pan is dry, add another ¼ cup liquid.)
3. Remove cinnamon stick and purée apples using an immersion blender, potato masher, food processor, blender or food mill.

### **Love Note**

Most apple recipes call for Granny Smiths because they have a tart brightness and keep their shape when cooked. But in this case you want something that breaks down easily and with a sweeter profile so you don't have to add too much sugar. Gravensteins are excellent if you can find them. Also good are Fuji, Pink Lady, Gala and Golden Delicious. Feel free to use a mix.

### **Belle Cohen Schroeder's Story**

Belle is an extra special mom, because she's my mother. She was born to Russian-Jewish parents in 1920 in Philadelphia (her dad died just before she was born). Raised during the depression, Belle began working as a waitress when she was sixteen, then married her boss and became a restaurateur herself. She and her first husband, Roy, owned a number of different restaurants where Belle was the cook, waitress, hostess and manager (kind of like I am today). When they divorced, she opened up her own luncheonette, called "The Little Spot" – with only 3 booths and 13 stools. She made everything from scratch every day, and waited on the customers, too. She was a trailblazer – a single mother of two running a successful business back in the 50's. She met my father in 1955, they married in 1956, she sold her restaurant, and I was born a year later.

Belle passed away when I was only twenty-one, but the memories of her cooking live on. There's no doubt I inherited my cooking abilities from her, who hosted numerous family dinners, fancy French buffets for 30 friends, and cooked every night for her family. I still remembers the "kvells" (oohing and ahing) of the family while they were sipping her mother's matzo ball soup or eating her made-from-scratch gefilte fish, and only wish she were alive today to taste mine. "So eat already!"