

BERKSHIRE JEWISH VOICES

Traveling with Jewish Taste

Around the World in Eight Days

By Carol Goodman Kaufman



No, we're not going to travel the globe in a hot air balloon for even eight days, much less eighty but, come this Hanukkah, we can do the culinary equivalent. As delicious as hot and crispy, oniony potato latkes are, why should we confine ourselves to the same-old-same-old, when there are so many other ways to partake of the gustatory traditions of the holiday?

So, grab your apron and let's plan a menu for the eight nights of Hanukkah.

Night #1: Pollo Fritto per Chanuka. We'll start our holiday with fried chicken. Ubiquitous throughout Italy on the holiday, this is not your typical KFC variety that requires soaking

in milk before breading. No, this kosher dish calls for a marinade of oil, lemon, nutmeg, and garlic before a dredging in flour and egg before frying. Crispy and tender, just as chicken should be. Add a salad and hot veggie to balance out your food pyramid, if not your guilt.

Night #2: Pescado Frito. While most people probably think of newspaper-wrapped fish and chips as a London street food, this traditional fried fish was eaten as early as ancient Rome. Our Sephardic ancestors along Spain's southern coast first introduced the dish back in the 16th century, and its popularity spread through the Mediterranean. The recipe is quite simple. Take a nice piece of white fish, such as cod, dredge it in flour and deep fry in hot oil. Salt and a squeeze of fresh lemon are the only other ingredients. What could be easier?

Night #3: Kubbeh. There are almost as many different recipes as there are pronunciations of this dish, but for me, kubbeh (aka kibbie, kibbeh, kubbi) is the one I like in honor of the torpedo-shaped delights I devoured at the home of my Israeli friend, whose Iraq-born mother prepared them by the score. Kubbeh are dumplings made with semolina and bulgur wheat, stuffed with ground lamb or beef, and flavored with herbs and spices before frying. Most Israeli restaurants that offer kubbeh serve them as dumplings in soup, but they are just as good on their own.

Because the preparation is quite labor intensive, it is common to prepare huge batches and freeze some. However, if you don't have the desire to spend hours in the kitchen, simply ask a New Jersey friend to bring you a container from Ima in Teaneck, an offshoot of the eponymous restaurant in Jerusalem.

Night #4: Keftes de Prasa. Leek fritters are popular among the Sephardic Jews of Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria, and because they are fried, they are traditionally served at Hanukkah. The late food historian Gil Marks writes that leek or spinach keftes are also served on both Rosh Hashanah and Passover. Why leeks specifically at Rosh Hashanah? The Hebrew word for leek in is related to the word *kareyt*, which means "to cut." Thus, many Sephardic Jews place leeks on the table with the prayer that those who wish to hurt them in the coming year will instead be cut down.

Night #5: Crochette de Patate Alla Siciliana. Sicilian Potato Croquettes are a popular Italian street food made with mashed potatoes. Crispy on the outside, soft and creamy inside, these little joys remind me of rice-based *arancini*, also a very common street food in Sicily. But you don't have eat them on the run. Serve them as an appetizer or with a nice salad. The key is to use a high-starch potato such as Russet or Yukon Gold rather than a waxy white or red potato in order to achieve maximum fluffiness.

Night #6: Skaltsounia. These small stuffed pies are usually served as a dessert, drizzled in honey, but Greek Jews enjoy a savory version similar to Israeli bourekas, stuffed with spinach and cheese.

These treats aren't fried, so why am I including them on the Hanukkah menu? If you'll recall, in the biblical story of Judith, our heroic ancestor saved her village from assault by Assyrian troops by seducing their General Holofernes. She fed him salty cheese and when he became thirsty, she plied him with wine. When he fell asleep, she took his sword and lopped off his head. When the troops saw what had happened, they fled, leaving the village in peace. So, at Hanukkah, it became customary to consume dairy foods in honor of her bravery.

Night #7: Potato latkes. Okay, so I had to include the iconic Ashkenazic Hanukkah dish. As long as we have latkes in the house, Joel is happy. In fact, he listed the ways he would consume his on each and every one of the eight nights of the holiday: with applesauce, with sour cream, with both applesauce and sour cream ... you get the picture. As for me, I'm a no-frills kind of girl. Just give me a saltshaker and I'll be happy with super crisp outsides, soft interiors.

Night #8: How about a dessert buffet? While we have all become familiar with the Israeli national Hanukkah jelly doughnuts called *sufganiyot*, the Jewish diaspora offers a plethora of fried dough recipes. There are Italian fritelle de Chanuka, diamond-shaped fritters flavored with anise seeds and raisins; Moroccan sfenj, orange doughnut rings; and cinnamon and sugar sprinkled Cuban bimuelos, fritters. Then there are Greek loukoumades, fried puffs with an olive-oil based

Crochette de Patate Alla Siciliana

Adapted from Joyce Goldstein's *Sephardic Flavours, Jewish Cooking of the Mediterranean*
Makes about 15 croquettes



Ingredients

2 pounds Russet or Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and quartered
2 whole eggs, plus 2 egg yolks
3/4 cup grated Parmesan cheese
1/4 cup chopped fresh chives
1/4 cup chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

Salt and freshly ground black pepper
Freshly grated nutmeg or ground mace
1/2 cup all-purpose flour, or as needed
1 cup cornflake crumbs, or as needed
Vegetable oil for deep-frying

Directions

Place the potatoes in a saucepan with salted water to cover.

Bring to a boil and cook until tender, about 20 minutes.

Drain and pass the warm potatoes through a ricer placed over a bowl, or mash well with a hand masher.

Add the whole eggs, egg yolks, cheese, chives, and parsley to the potatoes and mix well. Season well with salt, pepper, and nutmeg or mace, again mixing well.

Cover and chill for about 1 hour to make the mixture easier to shape.

Spread the flour on a plate, then spread some of the cornflake crumbs on a second plate. To make the croquettes, scoop up some potato mixture and form into a 2-inch-long oval, or into a round if you prefer.

Dip the croquette first into the flour, coating evenly, and then into the crumbs, again coating evenly.

Place on a rack or on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper.

Repeat until all the potato mixture is used. Refrigerate the croquettes until you are ready to fry them. (Goldstein says that they will hold together better if they are cold.)

To cook, pour the oil to a depth of 3 inches into a deep saucepan or wok and heat to 375°F.

When the oil is hot, add the croquettes to the hot oil, a few at a time, and fry until golden, about 5 minutes.

Using a slotted spoon or tongs, transfer to paper towels to drain.

Keep warm in a low oven for no more than 10 to 15 minutes.

Repeat until all croquettes are cooked, then serve piping hot.

dough; Egyptian zalabia, fried dough balls bathed in orange blossom or rose water syrup; and Persian funnel cake called zoulabia.

Of course, you could always just grab a handful of gold foil-wrapped chocolate coins.

Carol Goodman Kaufman is a psychologist and author with a passion for travel and food. She is currently at work on a food history/cookbook, tracing the paths that some of our favorite foods have taken from their origins to appear on dinner plates and in cultural rites and artifacts around the world. She invites readers to read her blog at carolgoodmankaufman.com and to follow her on Twitter @goodmankaufman.

