

Ed Note: With all things being lefse this month, I thought I would run an old article I wrote to fill in the empty space. It takes longer to read this than to make lefse but you may find it useful. MJ Flammen April 2018

Lefse Making for Rookies

In some ways making lefse is simple. Take four cups of potato buds and mix in four cups of boiling water, a cup of half and half, a stick of butter and two teaspoons of salt and a tablespoon of sugar. Cool overnight and mix in two and one-half cups of flour. Shape into 30 balls of dough, flatten each ball into a 10 inch round, throw on the griddle and bam, you have lefse.

That is what the many lefse recipes on Google would have you believe. It is much more complex and it takes work and time to learn how to make good lefse. I was lucky. I was taught the right way the first time by the Lefse Queens at Fjellheim Lodge.

However, because I am a man, I had to experiment. Disaster each time. Sticky, unusable dough and tough, inedible lefse. Wasted time and money but I learned a few things I am going to share in case there are some wannabe lefse-makers out there.

First, the right equipment makes all the difference. Men get this. They will build a deck just to buy a new saw. Here, we get a new rolling pin. Your rolling pin should be grooved with a sock covering the barrel. It will hold flour well and this will keep the dough from sticking.

The most difficult part of lefse-making is rolling the dough into a nice round piece. It wants to stick to the rolling pin and the pastry cloth. The lefse round is thin and fragile so it will tear easily if it is sticking. Two or three frustrating incidents of torn lefse and you learn to flour the rolling pin and pastry cloth often.

A pastry cloth to roll the dough will hold flour and it will keep the dough from sliding as you roll the dough from the middle outward making it thinner and thinner. You can tape a kitchen

towel to the counter top or you can get a specially made, round pastry cloth like the Lefse Queens use from Bethany Housewares in Cresco, Iowa. It has circles on it to measure as you go and Bethany printed in the middle. You know the lefse is thin enough when you can read the words through the lefse.

A lefse stick is essential to lift the lefse from the pastry cloth to the hot griddle and then off the griddle. It looks like a toy wooden sword beveled to rounded point. If you do not have a lefse stick, I guess you can use your fingers. Unfortunately, if those fingers touch the 500 degree iron, they will blister before you feel it. Uffda.

A dedicated lefse griddle makes life easier. It gets hot enough for lefse - 485 to 500 degrees. Bethany makes 10,000 of them each year. One has your name on it.

A Kitchen Aide mixer on a stand is not necessary but trying to mix the flour with cold mashed potatoes and flour with anything else will test you. Use the open paddle, not the dough hook.

Buying the proper groceries is also essential. Potato buds have one legitimate use - lefse. They are easier and faster than cooking and mashing potatoes. More importantly, they are consistent and you control the water content.

I have tried three brands and Betty Crocker works best. The others produced a stickier dough. Besides, Betty was a Norske lady from Minneapolis, you know. King Arthur flour works best. I do not know why, it just does. Sift, of course.

The process begins easy enough. Combine the potato mix from the first paragraph above by hand and put in the refrigerator overnight. The next day, things get serious. Get everything ready - flour the rolling pin and pastry cloth, set up the lefse iron and load up a flour sifter. Then put one third the cold mix and cups of flour alternately in the mixer bowl. Mix slowly.

From this point, work steadily. Once the flour is mixed in, the dough starts to get increasingly sticky. I do not know why but it does. So, do not go for a walk or even take a coffee break. Move directly from the mixer to shaping about 30 balls about the size of an ice cream scoop, two and one half ounces. Place them on a waxed paper covered cookie sheet and put in the refrigerator.

Take the balls out of the refrigerator one at a time for rolling. I know it means opening the refrigerator a lot but it is worth it. Cold dough works better. Lightly flour your pastry cloth between each ball. If some dough gets stuck, scrape off with a knife and flour again.

Be warned that if you work too much flour into the dough while rolling it, the lefse will be tough. If you do not use enough, it will stick to everything. With the recipe above, I have not had tough lefse and it does not stick.

Rolling the round ball to a flat, round disc is not difficult. Start in the middle rolling outwards without pushing down very hard. As your rolling pin gets to the edge, lift it slightly. If the edge gets too thin it bakes before the rest of the lefse and get too crispy. Lifting at the edge also helps to keep the lefse from rolling around the rolling pin.

When you have a ten inch round, slide the lefse stick under the round in the middle, gently lift it to the griddle and unroll it without touching the griddle. The griddle is hot and the lefse is thin so pay attention.

People like brown spots on their lefse, not black, so check it often and flip accordingly. When done, lefse should cool on a wire rack, then put between waxed paper and into an airtight plastic bag.

Then eat it or keep it at cool room temperature for a few days or freeze it. Freezing it works well. Thawed and warmed in the microwave, it tastes hot and fresh.

In summary, get the right equipment from Bethany, use Betty Crocker Potato Buds, King

Arthur flour, cool the potato mixture overnight, mix in the flour, keep the dough cold, and work steady until done (about two hours).

Then take a coffee break and have one of your two and half dozen perfect lefse.