

NORWAY

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Schrag has made lefse in South Dakota; Washington; Kansas; Manitoba, Canada; and Germany throughout his life, introducing it to friends all over the world, to varying degrees of excitement. “It’s not always popular,” he says. Seattle-born Susan Hale, a second-generation Norwegian American (who is currently “hiding out from COVID-19 on Molokai”), loves lefse. “I love the taste. I’m a potato fan, and you’re eating potatoes with your hands! And what’s wrong with that?” Hale says. After our phone interview, Hale sent me a picture of the last time she ate lefse. It was a few months ago, the lefse purchased from Larsen’s Bakery of Crown Hill and displayed on a beautifully ornate plate — “a little plate that my grandfather used when he had a little snack, it is from Norway and has a cup and

saucer to match,” Hale wrote. For Hale, eating lefse brings back memories of “an innocent time when you were a kid at your grandparents’ house doing whatever you wanted to do.” “There are smells and flavors that take you back,” Hale says. And for Hale, lefse was always part of Christmas and any gathering with family — topped with butter. “If we were really good, we got it with sugar. It was never a savory thing, always served with coffee from my grandparents in the afternoon,” Hale says. Strong, the cookbook author, first learned to make lefse with her Grandma Adeline, a woman born and raised in North Dakota who ended up working in a lefse factory in Seattle after moving to the area. Strong’s paternal grandmother died in 2008 before she had a chance to “ask her to start telling me her stories.”

Afterward, Strong made a concerted effort to make a lasting connection through baking with Grandma Adeline. “She was my only grandma left, and if I had to go through that regret-laced pain again, I couldn’t bear it. She and I had been really close growing up and I have photos of baking lefse specifically when I was a tiny child,” Strong says. I haven’t made lefse yet this year. My Grandma Jean’s griddle and all the accoutrements are at my parents’ house in North Dakota. But I might improvise and take a tip from Schrag, who simply uses a cast-iron pan with low sides and a spatula to turn his lefse. A pastry cloth and a sock for my rolling pin can be easily ordered online or picked up at the Ballard shop Scandinavian Specialties (\$2.99 for a pack of two).

LEFSE

Recipe from Jean Varriano
Yield: 25 lefse

5 large russet potatoes
1/2 cup heavy cream
1 teaspoon salt
3 tablespoons unsalted butter
3-4 cups flour

1. In a large stock pot filled with enough water to cover, place peeled potatoes. Over medium-high heat, bring the water and potatoes to a gentle boil. Cook until potatoes are tender, 12-15 minutes from the start of the boil. Drain and place in a large mixing bowl.

2. Rice or mash potatoes thoroughly, making sure there are no lumps. Cut the butter into small chunks and mix with the potatoes, adding cream and salt. Keep mixing until thoroughly absorbed.

3. Cover and refrigerate for at least 8 hours or up to 2 days.

4. When ready to cook, heat an electric griddle to 450 degrees Fahrenheit, or use a cast-iron skillet or flat grill pan over medium-high heat. Prepare a workspace with either a pastry cloth or a well-

floured surface.

5. In a smaller bowl, use a fork to mix 1 cup of riced potato mixture with 1/2 cup flour until it forms a smooth dough. Keep the larger bowl of potato mixture in the fridge, working with 1 cup at a time.

6. From the smaller bowl, take a golf ball-sized handful of dough and roll it between your hands to form a ball.

7. Flatten the dough with the heel of your hand to create a disc and place the dough on the floured surface or floured pastry cloth. Working from the center out, roll the dough into as thin of a circle as possible — or a thickness of 1/8 inch. Use additional flour to prevent sticking as necessary.

8. Using a lefse stick, bench scraper or spatula, lift the lefse and tap to release excess flour.

9. Lay in the skillet and cook 1 to 2 minutes on each side, until speckled with golden-brown spots.

10. Transfer to a clean tea towel, covering with another tea towel.

11. Continue rolling additional lefse while cooking. Keep cooked lefse under the tea towel to keep warm.

12. Store in the fridge for up to 1 week or freeze for up to 3 months.



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