

# Lefse: the Norwegian original



Pete Gimre is stoked about making lefse, a Norwegian delicacy.

When Norwegians say that lefse dates back to the Viking days, some may ask: “How can that be when the potato wasn’t introduced to Norway until the 18th century?”

Maybe you’ve heard of potato lefse, but have you heard of *Hardanger lefse*?

Not as well known to Scandinavian-Americans as potato lefse, Hardanger lefse has a much longer history than potato lefse, dating back to Viking days.

Hardanger lefse, the first lefse in Norway, didn’t contain potatoes but was made from flour. It was an important and reliable staple in the Norwegian diet. If a harvest went bad or there was a food shortage, there was usually some lefse left on the shelf. That, plus stored lutefisk were sometimes the only thing that kept people alive in harsh times.

Women would travel from house to house, village to village to make lefse together to last the winter months. The flour lefse would cook up like a cracker and be able to last throughout the season. Lefse was stored in wooden boxes covered in cloth or just stacked on shelves. When the lefse was used, it was dipped in water and soaked between damp cloths until softened. All through the Middle Ages different types of flour and liquids were used to make lefse.

With the introduction of potatoes in the 18th century, they were easy to grow and became abundant. The potato was incorporated into many Norwegian foods, even lefse. There was no way to properly store leftover potatoes, and lefse was found to be a good preservation method.

Like Ireland, Norway experienced a potato famine in the mid-1800s, and this is about the time that many Norwegians came to the U.S. With them, they brought their knowledge — and their rolling pins. The result has been a Norwegian delicacy that’s become part of a special tradition replicated in many Norwegian-American homes for more than 150 years.

Sons of Norway Nidaros lodge has been making Hardanger lefse for as many years as anyone can remember for the Scandinavian Midsummer Festival here in Astoria. In preparation, over a weekend’s work, lodge members gather for lefse making with the goal of making 2000 pieces.

The lefse will be softened and spread with a combination of butter, cinnamon and sugar, and it will be available for sale at the Sons of Norway booth at the Midsummer Festival. It has been a favorite of many festival attendees, selling out quickly every year! From desperation to delicacy, lefse remains an important part of Norwegian tradition and culture.

—Sonja Madsen, Festival historian



The next generation of lefse makers



Stages of lefse

## OLNEY GRANGE #793 POT ROAST DINNER

Enjoy a delicious start to the Astoria Scandinavian Midsummer Festival.

Olney Grange serves a pot roast dinner Friday night in the Exhibit Hall at the Clatsop County Fairgrounds. The dinner menu includes pot roast, baked potato, salad, green beans, roll, pie and beverages.

The dinner runs 4:30 through 6:30 p.m. The cost is \$14 for adults, \$8 for children 11 and under. Proceeds from the meal go to grange hall improvements, 4-H and other grange-sponsored events.

This is a wonderful opportunity to enjoy a great meal, then attend the coronation of Miss Scandinavia 2018 on the Arena stage at 7 p.m.



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