

Pancakes in the Oven?

I watched Marlana, one of the cooks that worked for me in our restaurant a few years ago, whipping up what appeared to be a scratch batter of some kind. She won't mind me saying that some of the things she showed me in the kitchen were kind of "out there," if you know what I mean.

A lot of the new menu items and fun foods we offered came to us as a direct result of assembling an eclectic combination of talent in the restaurant. I encouraged the kitchen staff to experiment and we were blessed with new, innovative food dishes. A Brazilian baker gave us savory meat pies, Angela from Midland had a brainstorm one lunch and produced our first toasted wraps, then there was blue cheese dressing, sizzling angel hair pasta and much more.

Now back to Marlana. I suppose being married to a Welshman influenced her culinary style, but I've got an idea that those wheels were turning long before her hubby, David, showed up on the scene. I'd emphasize her many other talents but I'm sure she'll end up reading this and our history of lovingly exchanging insults when we are together could be damaged well beyond repair. (I still consider your leg of lamb overcooked, by the way!)

The next time I saw that batter it was golden brown, all puffed up and coming out of the oven. That was my first actual contact with German puffed pancakes and, interestingly enough, the proper way to make a Yorkshire pudding to accompany a beef roast.

For a Saturday morning breakfast experience, this recipe will make an impact and it comes with "presentation." Like crème brûlée, bananas foster and crepe suzette, this dish produces a reaction. Expectant diners will emit a quick "yeah!" and start fidgeting to get at it.

Marlana's German Puffed Pancake (Produces 2 medium servings)

You'll need a good quality metal handled 8-inch non stick skillet that can be used directly in the oven for this dish and, for goodness sakes, get a good one. You can go out and buy \$150 worth of food for a special meal with family and friends, then watch the whole event get ruined because you tried to cook it all in a \$15 piece of cookware. Here's what you'll need:



½ cup whole milk
½ cup top quality all purpose flour
¼ cup sugar
2 large eggs, allowed to come up to room temperature
4 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 teaspoon real vanilla
powdered sugar for dusting

Preheat the oven to 400°F and set the rack as close to middle as possible. Put your skillet on a medium burner and melt 2 tablespoons of your butter. Right before you add the batter be sure to swish the butter carefully around the skillet, coating the sides as best as you can.

For the batter, combine milk, flour, eggs, sugar and vanilla in a medium mixing bowl and whisk them together into a very smooth batter. Distribute your butter in the skillet and add half of your batter mix. Allow it to firm up on the burner for about 60 seconds without stirring it then place it in the preheated oven for 12 to 15 minutes. Avoid opening the oven when you check it but your pancake is ready to eat when it is beautifully browned and has taken on a fluffy, puffed appearance. The sides of the pancake will actually climb up the sides of the skillet producing a high edged plate like shape, which is perfect for adding goodies if you like.

Purest like to use just a liberal dusting of confectioner's sugar, a bare splash of lemon juice and maybe a small amount of maple syrup, warmed and drizzled into the pancake. I've also had them with fried apples and brown sugar, cherries or blueberries in a glaze with a dollop of whipped cream, and fried bananas with brown sugar and pecans. There's no limit and I'd love to hear from you if you come up with something unique that worked.

Now back to my earlier comment about British Yorkshire pudding, which is produced much that same way with some slight variations. This is a wonderful recipe to learn and perfect if your family enjoys beef, particularly a roast. Most Brit's wouldn't think of having their meat without their pudding and many think the pudding is the best part of the meal.

Yorkshire Pudding Batter

1 ½ cups all-purpose flour, sifted
4 large eggs
2 cups whole milk
salt & pepper, to taste
unsalted butter, as needed

Cook your roast beef as usual. While the roast is cooking you can prepare your batter.

Beat the eggs together with a whisk and add in about a third of your milk. Gradually beat in the flour and then the remaining milk until you have a smooth batter. Salt and pepper to taste.

When your roast comes out of the oven it will need to rest just a bit before you can carve and serve. This is the perfect time to prepare your pudding. Bring the temperature in the oven up to 425°F and while the temperature is coming up add just enough butter to the drippings to allow for an even coating over the entire roast pan. I basically deglaze this way and loosen up bits of meat and caramelized drippings so that all will be added into the pudding along with a ton of magnificent flavor.

Place the pan back into the hot oven just long enough for the drippings to begin to smoke then pour in the pudding batter. The pudding will expand and climb up the sides of the roasting pan, gradually turning deep golden brown when it is done, after approximately 20 to 30 minutes. You'll never have roast beef again without a Yorkshire pudding once you've tried it.

Our wine find for this week is another excellent red wine for those of you who have enjoyed white wines and are now looking for a soft, dry red to help you move into that direction. Our source is the very talented staff of Lion's Peak Vineyards in Paso Robles, California, and they never cease to amaze me with what they are capable of.

The 2001 Lion's Peak Sangiovese is a serious red wine made from the Italian varietal that is the base for some of the extraordinary wines of Tuscany. In this case, it has a lighter intensity along with a delicate styling, which makes the wine a natural for you if you're just moving into that venue. Tannin levels were very well managed and the flavors had more fruit focus than a full-blown Sangiovese would normally offer and that works in this presentation.

If we can be of assistance with your food or wine questions just let us know. We'd love to hear from you at (888) 288-0668 or visit us on the web at www.winedog.com, where we also offer a complete archive of our columns and recipes back to when we began publishing them. Have a great week and cheers!