



Baked Smoky Sweet Potato Latkes

-- Make better latkes with a quick boiling water bath --

November 17, 2014 *By: Melissa d'Arabian*

During college, I took a class on global populations and food (affectionately known as “pops and crops”). I’m sure it was a fine class, but really only one lesson has stuck with me in the 25 years since.

Professor Tremblay was adamant that if we ever were on a deserted island and could take only one food with us, we should choose the sweet potato. “A nutritional bargain,” he called it. And he was right. One cup of the tasty tuber has seven times more vitamin A than you need in a day, more than half of the vitamin C, 7 grams of filling fiber and 4 grams of protein. There’s also vitamin B6, potassium, calcium and iron.

And of course they are wonderfully sweet. That does come at a price; sweet potatoes have about twice the sugar of carrots, ounce per ounce. (I suppose this is less of a concern if you are on a deserted island.) But the good news is that the sweetness really satisfies, no sugary ketchup (or marshmallows) needed.

But how to incorporate this natural little treat into our diets without resorting to melted marshmallow casseroles? Try sweet potatoes instead of regular potatoes in your favorite recipes, oven-baked fries, for instance. In terms of flavor, smoky and spicy play off the sweetness perfectly. Sweet potato soup with adobo or chipotle Greek yogurt is pretty perfect in that way.

Also try subbing sweet potato in some of your favorite root vegetable recipes. Roasted sweet potato and parsnip hash, anyone?

With the coming of Hanukkah, I was inspired to make smoky sweet-potato latkes, which balance the sugar of the sweet potatoes with earthy cumin and smoked paprika. They are delicious and crispy and perfect accompanied by unsweetened applesauce and plain Greek yogurt or sour cream.

Since most of us don’t care to deep-fry at home, I baked my latkes. To ensure they were still crispy, both the pan and latkes get brushed with oil. Much easier, much less mess and a whole lot leaner. I also found a great way to cut the cooking time. I par-cook the shredded sweet potatoes by pouring boiling water over them. This not only speeds up the baking, it also washes away some of the starch, which results in a crispier latke.



SMOKY SWEET-POTATO LATKES

Recipe By: Melissa d'Arabian

Start to finish: 45 minutes

Makes 16 latkes

1 large sweet potato, peeled and grated (about 4 cups)
1/2 large yellow or sweet onion, grated (about 3/4 cup)
1 egg
1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
1/2 teaspoon ground cumin
1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika
1/3 cup cornstarch
4 tablespoons canola or vegetable oil, divided
Plain Greek yogurt and unsweetened applesauce, to serve

Heat the oven to 400 degrees. In a large colander, combine the sweet potato and onion. Set over the sink. Bring about 4 cups of water to a boil. Slowly pour the water over the potato mixture, then let it drain and cool until easily handled, 8 to 10 minutes. A handful at a time, place the sweet potato mixture in a clean kitchen towel and squeeze to extract as much liquid as possible, then transfer to a large bowl.

In a small bowl, beat together the egg, salt, cumin and paprika, then stir into the sweet potato mixture. Sprinkle the cornstarch over the sweet potatoes and mix well. The mixture should be moist, but not wet. If needed, blot excess moisture and add a little more cornstarch.

Use 2 tablespoons of the oil to evenly coat a rimmed baking sheet. Divide the sweet potato mixture into 16 mounds (each about 2 tablespoons) on the prepared baking sheet, leaving about 2 inches between them. Use the bottom of a glass or measuring cup to flatten each.

Using a pastry brush and the remaining 2 tablespoons of oil, brush the tops of the latkes with oil. Bake for 15 to 20 minutes, or until lightly browned and crisp. Serve the latkes with a dollop of yogurt and applesauce. Makes about 16 latkes.

Nutrition information per serving: 60 calories, 3.5 g fat (0 g saturated), 15 mg cholesterol, 6 g carbohydrates, 1 g fiber, 1 g sugar, 1 g protein, 70 mg sodium.