

DIY Hanukkah



This holiday season is a little different for me. And by a little, of course, I mean A LOT. The last few years I've sorta avoided Christmas. Britney's song comes to mind, I'm Not a Girl, Not Yet a Woman. You get the idea. I was Jewish in spirit and solidarity. Now? I'm a woman, y'all. Well. You know what I mean.

In April I had my religion reassignment surgery so to speak. I am Jewish. And you know what? It all seems easy breezy when you're ready to make a switch. You justify the change you're going to make because you want to make it. Then? The reality sets in. Those Christmas trees look real cute this year. They didn't before. The holiday lights? I want to be wrapped in them. I am not disappointed in choosing to become (BE) Jewish. I'm just maybe having more of a Christmas Mourning (ha!) period than I had expected.



Not to mention this time of year feels a little bit like living in a blender. Holiday parties, shopping craziness, traveling to Florida with family. It's a crazy time. Couple that with a busy work schedule (for me AND the husband) and you can only hope that a hot bath at the end of the day will bring you back to normal.

So what have I done other than purchase an enormous bag of lavender bath salts? Well, Hanukkah started last night. If I can't really dig in to one holiday, how about another. The trouble of course is that I'm a **new** Jew. I don't have a Bubbe's recipe for latkes or a Zayde's amazing recipe for applesauce that has been handed down for generations. Sometimes you have to build it yourself. So I did.

My favorite kitchen mentor at the moment is Ina Garten. Ina who also happens to be a fabulous Jewess. She's not old enough to be my Bubbe, but let's pretend for a moment. It should come to no surprise to any of us that she made homemade applesauce AND latkes this week on her show. One day when I'm old and gray, the recipes which follow will be the ones I pass to whatever little kids I can force to listen to me. Let me just say this...you need to add homemade applesauce to your bag of Hanukkah tricks. This stuff is worth fighting for.

Applesauce:

WHAT:

2 large navel oranges, juice and zest of

1 lemon, juice and zest of

3 lbs granny smith apples (about 6-8 apples)

3lbs sweet red apples (about 6-8)...I used honey crisps

1/2 cup light brown sugar

4 tablespoons unsalted butter

2 teaspoons ground cinnamon

1/2 teaspoon allspice

HOW:

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Place the zest and juice of the oranges and lemon in a large bowl. Peel, quarter and core the apples (reserving the peel of 2 of the red apples) and toss them in the juice. Pour the apples, reserved apple peel and juice into a nonreactive Dutch oven or enameled iron pot. Add the brown sugar, butter, cinnamon and allspice and cover the pot. Bake for 1 hour or until apples are soft. Remove and discard the apple peel. Mix with a whisk until it's as smooth (or chunky) as you like.

Boom. You're life has changed. ENJOY!

Latkes:

I know errrrbody has their own latke recipe. Here's Ina's. Give it a whirl.

WHAT:

2 lbs baking potatoes

2 extra-large eggs, lightly beaten

6 tablespoons flour

2 1/2 teaspoons kosher salt

1/2 teaspoons freshly ground black pepper

6 tablespoons clarified butter

HOW:

Peel the potatoes and grate them lengthwise. Place them in a colander or kitchen towel and squeeze out as much liquid as possible. combine the potatoes in a bowl with the egg, flour, salt and pepper. Mix well.

Melt 2 tables spoons of clarified butter in a skillet. Drop a heaping tablespoon of the potato mixture into the sizzling butter. Flatten with a spatula and cook for 2 minutes. Turn, flatten again, and cook for another 2 minutes, until crisp on the outside and golden brown.

Now I didn't do this fancy clarified butter business. I went for olive oil, because I'm lazy. BUT...here's a word on clarified butter from the Queen herself...

To make 6 tablespoons of clarified butter, slowly melt 8 tablespoons of butter in a small saucepan. Set it aside until the milk solids settle. Spoon off any solids that rise to the top and then carefully pour off the golden liquid, leaving the milky part in the bottom of the pan. Clarified butter has a higher burning temperature than melted butter.

May your Hanukkah be everything you wish for and may those lights be full of blessings for you and yours. Hanukkah Sameach!