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DEFINITION

Pancakes are also known as crepes, blinis, flapjacks, griddle-cakes and hot-cakes. Pancakes are thin flat cakes made from batter and fried on a griddle or on a hot plate. The batter is made from flour, milk or water, eggs and oil or melted butter.

HISTORY

The oldest form of bread is believed to have been a type of unleavened pancake. It has survived throughout history as a distinct food. In earlier times, English pancakes were sometimes moistened with ale, which had a leavening effect when the pancake was fried. Today, yeast, baking powder or soda are sometimes added to lighten the cake. Traditionally, pancakes were served as an appetizer, filled with a savoury filling and coated in a creamy sauce. At some stage different parts of France began to produce their own specialities and both Brittany and Agen have laid claim to being first region to serve them at the end of a meal instead of the start.

TYPES OF PANCAKES

Size and thickness define the different types; crepes are thin and delicate while American pancakes are thick with fruit included in the mixture. Pancakes can be served with maple syrup and cream or other similar sweet toppings, or with a savoury filling.

There are many different types of pancakes originating from all round the world. Some examples are listed below:

Blini are small pancakes originating from Russia and Poland and are made of wheat and buckwheat flour, yeast, butter, eggs and milk. Blini is often spread with caviar or slices of smoked salmon, stacked one on top of another and served with sour cream.

Blintz are a traditional pancake of Jewish cuisine with an eastern European origin. They are fried very thin and rolled with cheese, cream cheese or fruits, such as blueberries or apples, and served with sour cream.

Cannelloni is an Italian hors d'oeuvre or entrée. It may be made with noodle dough or pancake batter. The pancake is spread with a cheese or a finely chopped, well-seasoned meat mixture. It is then rolled and covered with a cheese sauce and baked.

Crepe is a French pancake. Crepes are made of a flour and egg batter and are very thin and light. They are often spread with jam, fruit, whipped cream or rolled in a sweet sauce and served as a dessert. The best known of these, Crepes Suzette, is doused with liqueur and set on fire. Crepes may be filled with meat, poultry or cheese and served as an entrée.

Palascinta is a Hungarian pancake that may be served for dessert or a main course, depending on its filling, which can be minced ham and mushrooms, grated cheese and sour cream or topped with preserves and sour cream.

Po-ping is the thin mandarin pancake used in such dishes as Peking duck and moo shu pork.

INGREDIENTS

INGREDIENT	FUNCTION & SPECIFICATIONS
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Flour	Buckwheat flour can be substituted for half of the plain flour.
Salt	To add flavour.
Eggs	For a richer batter an extra egg can be added to the standard recipe. Reduce the milk by 2 tablespoons.
Milk	A mixture of half milk and half water may be used rather than just milk. Water makes the pancakes very light, while milk makes the batter smooth and improves the golden brown colour of cooked pancakes. For savoury pancakes light chicken stock can be included in the liquid.

In addition, the following ingredients can be added to the batter:

- Yeast can also be added to the batter, with Russian blinis the best example of yeast pancakes. They have a different texture to chemically leavened pancakes, as they are light and airy.
- For dessert pancakes, caster sugar may be added for sweetness, as well as other optional inclusions such as finely grated citrus rind, lemon juice, almond or vanilla essence.
- Stirring 1–2 tablespoons of melted butter or bland vegetable oil into the batter before cooking gives pancakes a rich flavour and prevents them sticking to the pan.

PROCESSING TIPS

- The ingredients should be beaten until they are combined and smooth. Too much whisking causes the gluten in the flour to develop and as a result the pancakes will be tough and chewy. However, with yeast batters, vigorous beating is required to develop the gluten.
- The quantity of liquid of any pancake recipe may need to be adjusted as individual flours will vary. A batter with a fairly thin pouring consistency is the aim.

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- Although it's not essential to let the batter rest before cooking, it does produce a lighter pancake. Pancakes made from freshly made batter tend to have a bubbly rather than a flat surface. The batter should be covered and set aside in a cool place to allow the starch in the flour to swell. The batter may require a light mix after this rest period in case it has begun to separate. The batter will thicken if left to stand for too long and will begin to ferment if left for more than 12 hours.
- Pancakes should be baked until bubbles appear on the surface and start to burst. If the underside is golden brown then the pancake should be turned over. Two or three minutes per side is usually sufficient
- The filling is usually spooned into pancake after cooking and then the pancake is rolled or folded into a neat parcel. There are many ways to fold a savoury or sweet pancake and these include the basic roll, cigarette, parcel, baton, triangle and the stack.
- Choosing a pan: Although a normal frying pan can be used, pancakes tend to stick and are difficult to turn. A special pancake or crepe pan is smaller with a smooth base and sloping curved sides. The most popular sized pancake is 18–20 cm, made in a pan 25cm in diameter (of rim). A heavy pan is important so batter cooks quickly and evenly. Traditional pans made of cast iron take time to heat up but heat evenly.

In industry, pancakes are manufactured from a pourable batter, which can be piped or deposited on to a stone plate in amounts to give final desired sizes. In New Zealand no commercial pancakes are made, but pancake premixes are popular which just require the consumer to add water and with excessive shaking produce a suitable batter for cooking.

PANCAKES VS. WAFFLES – IN SERVICE

Waffles (griddle cakes) and pancakes (hot cakes) are both made from pourable batters although pancakes are made on a griddle while waffles are made using a waffle iron. They are similar products but key differences are that waffles contain more fat and less liquid to produce a thicker batter, and are given extra lightness by beating the egg whites separately and folding them into the batter.

Both items should be cooked to order and served warm as waffles lose crispness easily and pancakes toughen. However, for volume service pancake and waffle batter leavened by baking powder only can be made the night before and stored in the cooler. Some rising power may be lost so increased levels of baking powder may be required. Batters made with baking soda should not be made ahead of service as soda will lose its power. A way around this is to mix dry ingredients and liquid ingredients ahead of time and combine the two just before service.

Batters using beaten egg whites and baking powder may be partially made ahead of service, but don't incorporate the egg whites until just before service.

REFERENCES

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