

## Honey cake and other Jewish treats

By Linda Turner Griepentrog / *For The Bulletin*

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The origins of Jewish food customs are as diverse as the history of the people who observe them, and all are steeped in centuries-old traditions based on varying beliefs and heritages — as well as how families interpret them. But one thing most of these religious holidays have in common is a food lore worthy of sampling, whether Jew or non-Jew, and sweets are common to all.

### Rosh Hashana

Rosh Hashana begins this year at sunset on Sunday and goes through nightfall on Sept. 18. According to Mimi Feldman, co-director of Chabad of Central Oregon, Rosh Hashana is a day of judgment, and it marks the beginning of the New Year. Sweet dishes are symbolically served to foretell a happy and sweet year ahead.

Three foods are associated with the celebration of Rosh Hashana — apples, honey and carrots. Chabad.org notes that the Rosh Hashana meal begins by dipping apples in honey and asking God for a blessing of a sweet upcoming year. Honey is also used as a cooking ingredient for many holiday sweets, the most notable of which is honey cake. Feldman notes that Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism) compares Jews to apples in God's orchard.

Why honey and not sugar? Feldman notes that because honey comes from bees, who also sting and cause pain, the symbolism is that Jews are asking God to help them overcome pain and become stronger in the coming year.

Carrots are also eaten for their sweetness and the Yiddish word for carrot — meren — also means "to increase." Hence, the hope of all good things increasing during the upcoming year. The Hebrew word for carrot is gezer, which has the same root as judgment, so there is hope of all judgments being positive, good and sweet.

In addition to those food traditions, Rosh Hashana often features circular and round foods, symbolizing the



Photos by Ryan Brennecke / The Bulletin

Rugelach, a cinnamon and nut pastry, is a very popular dessert for the first meal after Yom Kippur.





continuity of an eternal cycle. The popular braided challah bread is made in a round shape and often with raisins added, and meals also often include couscous, garbanzo beans and black-eyed peas.

To evoke good deeds, pomegranates (thought by some to contain 613 seeds — the number of commandments in the Torah) are often eaten during this holiday celebration in hopes, Feldman notes, of "goodness and happiness as numerous as the seeds." In addition, the round crown of the fruit fits with the circular foods idea.

### Yom Kippur

Yom Kippur is the Day of Atonement and begins at sunset Sept. 25 and ends at nightfall on Sept. 26. The meal served before sundown is usually substantial, but bland to prevent undue thirst. Julie Grossinger, author of "The Art of Jewish Cooking," notes that a typical meal might include chicken soup, boiled chicken, stewed fruit, sponge cake and tea. Honey cake is often served as well, again asking God for good and sweet things.

Yom Kippur is a day of fasting and daylong religious services. To break the fast, most people serve light foods that require little preparation time, such as salads, cold fish, sandwiches and some sweets like apple coffee cake or cheesecake. According to "The New York Times Jewish Cookbook," rugelach, a cinnamon and nut pastry, is a very popular dessert for the first meal after Yom Kippur, as is fresh ginger cake.

### Hanukkah

Hanukkah is also known as the Festival of Lights, and it's an eight-day celebration with gift exchanges and an atmosphere of fun. Its most recognized symbols are the menorah, a nine-light candelabra, and the dreidel, a four-sided spinning top used to play games. In 2012, Hanukkah begins at sunset on Dec. 8 and goes through nightfall on Dec. 16.

Jews observe the custom of eating foods fried in oil during Hanukkah to symbolize the oil left burning in the Holy Temple of Jerusalem after it was destroyed by Greek armies. When they ransacked the temple, the Greeks broke the seals on the oils blessed for the menorah, and left only a single jug with the seal intact — and it miraculously lasted eight days.



Making rugelach, step by step: 1) The dough is divided into 6 equal parts, formed into balls and refrigerated for an hour.



Making rugelach, step by step: 2) The dough is rolled out to 1/8 of an inch thick, spread with the filling and cut into 16 wedges.



Tasty fried treats include various flavors of potato pancakes, called latkes, with a host of toppings to make them sweet or savory. The most common toppings are applesauce and sour cream. A large selection of desserts, cakes and cookies are served to family and guests, including a traditional favorite called sufganiyot, or puffed donuts. The donuts are deep fried and filled with flavored jellies or custards, then sprinkled with powdered sugar. Fritters in various flavors offer another indulgence, as does kugel, a custard/pudding dish made with noodles.

## Apple Latkes

Makes 20 latkes.

1 lg egg  
1/3 C plain Greek yogurt plus 1/3 C low-fat milk, or 2/3 C natural plain yogurt  
1 C all-purpose flour  
1/2 tsp baking powder  
1/4 tsp baking soda  
1/2 tsp ground cinnamon  
2 TBS superfine sugar  
1 C grated apples (about 2 apples)  
Vegetable oil for frying  
Maple syrup (or confectioner's sugar and ground cinnamon)

Beat the egg with the yogurt and milk (or just the yogurt, if you're using the plain normal variety) and set aside. Combine the flour, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon and sugar in a bowl. Peel, quarter and core the apples, then grate them. Pour the yogurt mixture into the flour bowl, tip in the grated apples and fold it together. Pour 1/4-inch oil in a skillet and put on the stove to heat. Dollop spoonfuls of the apple batter into the sizzling oil; a rubber spatula (the one you used to fold the batter together) will help you scrape the batter off the spoon and press down on the little latkes in the pan. Fry for a minute or two, until the latkes are a golden brown on the undersides; you can see from the top as they start firming up underneath. Flip them with 2 metal spatulas and fry for another minute on the uncooked side. Remove to a tray lined with paper towels to blot the excess oil and continue cooking until you've used up all the batter. Top with maple syrup or sugar and cinnamon for serving.

— Adapted from foodnetwork.com

Making rugelach, step by step: 3) Starting from the edge of the dough, each slice is rolled toward the center, forming a crescent.

## K is for kosher

If you look at food packaging, you'll see several symbols that indicate whether the food item is kosher. Each symbol reflects the agency certifying the food, and there is no universal symbol for all resources. Other symbols include a D for dairy and a P for pareve, a "neutral" food. Kosher food is prepared in adherence with Jewish dietary laws found in the Torah. A person who follows kosher rules and regulations is said to be "keeping kosher" or to be "observant." It's up to individuals to decide whether to keep kosher.

Meat and dairy products are always served separately. After eating meat, there must be at least a six-hour wait before any dairy can be eaten. If dairy is eaten first, the waiting time for meat is one hour.

Meat has to be from an animal with split hooves and one that chews its cud. Cows, sheep and goats are the most common options. In addition, the animal must be slaughtered according to the kosher laws and the meat must be salted to remove the blood.

According to Faye Levy, author of "1,000 Jewish Recipes," meat is never served rare, always well done. Some poultry can be eaten, assuming it's properly processed according to the laws. The Torah lists which birds aren't kosher.

Fish must have both fins and scales to be considered kosher. All shellfish are off limits.

Dairy products must use milk only from kosher animals. Many observant Jews use alternative dairy products like those made from soy, rice, nuts, etc. All cheeses must be made without the use of animal rennet or gelatin.

The kosher cook must also maintain separate dishes, flatware, ovens and cooking utensils for meat and dairy foods. Dishes must be cleaned with separate sponges and towels and set on separate dish racks. The soap used for cleaning must also be kosher.

Both meat and dairy foods may be complemented with pareve foods, which fit neither category. According to "Jewish Cooking for Dummies," by Faye Levy, pareve foods include eggs, vegetables, fruits, grains, legumes and seasonings. Fruits and vegetables need to be inspected carefully and washed to be sure there is no insect contamination, as bugs aren't kosher, and eggs must be inspected after cracking for the presence of



## Classic Honey Cake

Makes 16 servings.

3 eggs  
1 1/3 C honey  
1 1/2 C sugar  
1 C strong black coffee  
2 TBS baking powder  
3 TBS margarine, softened  
1 tsp baking soda  
4 C flour  
1 tsp cinnamon

Heat oven to 325 degrees. Grease and flour a 9-by-13-inch cake pan. In a large mixing bowl, beat eggs and honey together. Add sugar and mix again. Mix coffee with baking powder, and then add with margarine to the egg mixture. Add baking soda, flour and cinnamon and beat together well. Pour into greased cake pan. Bake for 55 minutes to an hour.

— Adapted from "Spice and Spirit: The Complete Kosher Jewish Cookbook," published by Lubavitch Women's Cookbook Publications

## Sufganiyot

Makes 20-25, depending on size.

A well-known bakery in Jerusalem produces more than 200,000 of these each day during the month leading up to Hanukkah.

2 pkgs yeast  
1/3 C sugar  
3/4 C water  
1/4 C orange juice  
1/3 C margarine  
1/2 tsp salt  
4 or 5 C flour  
3 egg yolks  
Jelly of your choice for filling  
Powdered sugar

Mix water, sugar, juice and yeast. Let stand 10 minutes. Melt margarine and add to yeast mixture. Beat in eggs and salt. Add flour, mixing and kneading by hand to form a soft dough. Let rise 1 1/2 hours. Roll dough 1/4 inch thick and cut circles (approximately 2 inches). Let circles rise 30 minutes.

Deep fry at 400 degrees about 3 minutes, turning once. Fill with jelly and roll in powdered sugar.

— Adapted from Chabad.org

blood.

In baking, all ingredients need to be certified kosher in their production methods. Oil is often substituted for butter or margarine in cake and pastry recipes.

When asked about the availability of kosher foods, Mimi Feldman, co-director of Chabad of Central Oregon, points out that it depends a lot on where you live. In areas with a high concentration of observant Jews, there are entire supermarkets of kosher-certified foods, but in areas like Bend, it can sometimes be a struggle to find things. She often shops at Trader Joe's and Whole Foods, but the family also travels to Portland to bring home kosher food for their freezer.

Feldman relates a story about chocolate chips from Trader Joe's, originally labeled as kosher pareve, but recently relabeled with the kosher dairy symbol, not due to a change in ingredients, but in the manufacturing process, as the chips are now made on the same production line as the dairy variety and there's a chance for cross-contamination.

Trader Joe's includes a list of kosher-certified foods on its website, and also an extensive list of various certifying agencies for its offerings

([www.traderjoes.com/pdf/lists/list-kosher.pdf](http://www.traderjoes.com/pdf/lists/list-kosher.pdf)).

Eating out is also a concern for those keeping kosher. Feldman notes that the family never eats out here, but when they lived on the East Coast, they often went to kosher restaurants.

— Reporter: gwizdesigns@ aol.com

## Rugelach

Makes 96.

**For the dough:**

4 sticks margarine

6 C flour

8 oz dessert whip (like Cool Whip)

**For the filling:**

½ C ground nuts

1 C sugar

4 tsp cinnamon

**To make the dough:** Heat oven to 350 degrees. Cream margarine in mixer bowl for 3 minutes. Add flour and dessert whip and mix for 2 minutes. Divide the rugelach dough into 6 equal parts, form into balls and refrigerate for 1 hour. Remove 1 ball at a time. Roll dough out to ⅛ inch thickness.

**To make the filling:** Mix ingredients together. Spread the filling all around the dough, leaving ½-inch margin around the outer edge as well as a 1-inch diameter circle in the center of the dough. Cut into 16 equal triangle slices with a knife. Starting from the edge of the dough, roll each slice toward the center, forming a crescent. Bake on an ungreased cookie sheet at 350 degrees for 15 minutes. Do not overbake. Tops should remain light and the bottoms golden.

— Adapted from Chabad.org

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