

Budget-stretching CREPES

*Adding a dash of
savoir-faire to your meals*

By Valerie Phillips

Deseret News

Like souffles, omelets and other French dishes, crepes were once considered haute cuisine in American fine dining. Nearly every fancy restaurant had some form of these thin pancakes on the menu, with either a savory or sweet filling.

Yet, in France they are used as a budget-stretcher, as they are “an attractive way to turn leftovers or simple ingredients into a nourishing main-course dish,” as Julia Child wrote in her book “Mastering the Art of French Cooking.”

Crepes suzette, orange-flavored dessert crepes that were flamed at the table, were considered especially chic, as pointed out in this poem from the February 1943 issue of Gourmet magazine:

“No food is quite as debonair,
Nor is imbued with savoir-faire
It goes with pearls 'round swan-like necks
With limousines, five-figure checks
It matches coats of mink and sable
And priceless silver on the table
And yet, withal its rich appeal
So fitting for a prince's meal
The fact remains — and what a shame!
— It's only pancakes set aflame.”

The “flaming food” trend went by the wayside along with tableside preparations, and over the years crepes were crowded off menus as American palates expanded beyond French cuisine.

But, in today's budget-minded economy, crepes may well be on a comeback. They still have that “gourmet” flair, and you can put just about anything into a crepe filling: leftover ham or chicken, cheese, fruit, chocolate, sour cream with brown sugar, to name a few ideas.

And you don't need a lot of filling, said Bob Bryant,



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Chef Bob Bryant rolls a shrimp, artichoke and spinach crepe filling.

CREPES

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a local chef who taught a crepes class at the Harmons Culinary Education Center at the Bangerter Crossing store. For the class, he demonstrated a savory spinach, shrimp and artichoke filling; a sweet crepe filled with sliced, sweetened strawberries, and a chocolate crepe slathered with Nutella, the hazelnut-chocolate spread.

“Crepes are so simple,” he said. “We think of them as something stuffed with a lot of filling and rolled up, which is American-style. But in Europe there’s very little filling in them, and they are folded in thirds and served flat. You don’t want so much filling that you lose the value of the crepe, the texture and flavor.”

He’s noticed that in recent years, crepes are found on more dessert menus, especially crepe “cakes,” where stacks of crepes are layered with sweet fillings.

Crepe ingredients are simple: flour, egg, butter, and if it’s a sweet crepe, sugar and milk, said Bryant. If you’re going to use a savory filling, he recommends adding a pinch or two of curry.

Mixing

The thin batter can be mixed by hand with a whisk, but he recommends either a food processor or a blender. Then, it’s important to let the batter sit in the refrigerator at least 30 minutes, because the individual grains of flour need to absorb the egg and the milk, said Bryant. Otherwise, the crepes will turn out very dry, or stick to the pan. (In fact, Julia Child’s “Mastering the Art of French Cooking” recommends a two-hour wait.)

You may also need to thin the batter with a little water, if it’s too thick. The batter should be just thick enough to coat a wooden spoon.

“I’ve found that there can be a huge difference in how the flour absorbs, depending on how the flour was grown or stored, the humidity and so on,” said Bryant. “So, sometimes you have to make adjustments to get the right consistency in the batter.”

Cooking

You’ll need a small, flat, round pan, about 7 inches in diameter on the bottom. Brush it with melted butter or oil to prevent sticking.

“You can buy beautiful nonstick skillets, but I prefer using some old pans that the nonstick material has already worn off,” said Bryant. “Get it hot and rub it with oil; let it cool off and then rub in more oil. The first crepe will stick to the pan, but after you dig that crepe off the pan and apply more oil, the pan will be seasoned after a couple of times.”

1. Heat the pan on medium heat. “The heat needs to be fairly high, because otherwise the crepe will sit there too long to cook and get tough,” advised Bryant.

2. Use about 2 ounces of batter per crepe (about $\frac{1}{4}$

cup). A small ladle can help you portion the amount you need.

3. Pour in the batter from the top of the pan, and then tilt the pan in a circular motion so the entire bottom of the pan is thinly coated. The crepe should only be about $\frac{1}{16}$ of an inch thick.

4. Let the crepe cook for about a minute or two. There will be some bubbling. The outside edges of the crepe should have some browning before you flip the crepe over. (If in doubt, you can carefully lift the edge with a thin spatula and peek for doneness. It should be a mixture of golden brown and lighter areas.) A savory crepe will likely take longer to brown, because there's no sugar in it.

5. With practice, you might be able to toss the crepe over with a flip of the wrist. But at first, use a thin-bladed spatula to help you lift them up and flip them to the other side.

6. Brown the second side lightly, for about half-minute. (This second side will be less-attractive than the first side, so you will want to present the other side showing when you fold or roll it.)

7. Slide the crepe out onto

a plate or rack to cool.

8. Grease the pan again and make the next crepe.

Filling

While you're doing the next crepes, don't cover the cooked ones with plastic wrap; the moisture will condense on the plastic wrap and make the crepes soggy. Instead, put a paper towel over the top of them, which will keep them from drying out but also absorb condensation. Bryant placed the cooked crepes in a stack and was able to peel each crepe from the stack without any sticking or tears. "If you have enough oil in them, they won't stick together," he said.

"The Professional Chef," by the Culinary Institute of America, recommends stacking them between parchment paper if you plan to refrigerate or freeze them for later use.

Place the filling in the first third of the crepe. Fold the top of the crepe over, and tuck it under the filling. Then roll it, similar to a sushi roll. Or, you can fold it in thirds, European-style.

Although some restaurants serve crepes with sauce



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A shrimp, artichoke and spinach filling inside a buckwheat crepe made by chef Bryant.

poured over them, Bryant said, "I hate it when they put sauce on the outside of the crepe. It makes it gooey and takes away from the texture of the crepe. The sauce goes inside, and it should just be enough to moisten the crepe."

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BUCKWHEAT CREPES

2/3 cup buckwheat flour
1/3 cup all-purpose flour
2 eggs
1 1/4 cups milk or soy milk
1 pinch salt (preferably Real Salt)
1/4 cup melted butter, cooled
1-2 pinches curry powder, depending on how much

Butter or oil for cooking

In a food processor or blender, combine all ingredients except butter for cooking, and blend thoroughly. Refrigerate for 1/2 hour. Heat butter or oil in a small, flat

skillet over medium heat.

Ladle about 1/4 cup of batter into the skillet and tilt the pan in a circular motion so the entire bottom of pan is thinly coated, about 1/16-inch thick.

Let the crepe cook for about a minute or two. There will be some bubbling. The outside edges of the crepe should have some browning before you flip the crepe over. To check for doneness, you can carefully lift the edge with a thin spatula. It should be a mixture of golden brown and light areas.

Flip the crepe over and cook another half-minute on the other side. Slide crepe from pan onto a plate or rack to cool, and repeat. Makes 10 crepes.

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SPINACH, SHRIMP AND ARTICHOKE CREPES

1 recipe for buckwheat crepes (or sweet crepes with the sugar omitted)

1 cup bay shrimp, cooked

1 package frozen chopped spinach, thawed or drained (or use fresh spinach)

1 cup artichoke hearts, chopped

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

1 clove fresh garlic, minced

1/4 cup white wine or chicken broth

1/2 cup heavy cream

Salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

Cook crepes as directed.

In a large saute pan, heat the oil over medium heat, lightly saute the garlic. Add shrimp, spinach and artichokes, and cook 1 minute. Add wine or broth, and cook until liquid is gone, about 1 minute. Add the cream and cook until thick. Fill each crepe with about 1/3 cup of the filling. Serve hot. Makes about 3 servings of 3 crepes each.

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Chef Bob Bryant tucks the leading edge of the crepe under itself to make a tighter roll while teaching the class.



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Chef Bob Bryant cooks up a batch of crepes as he prepares to teach a class at Harmons grocery store in Draper Jan. 2.