

How Small-Beer or Ale Pancakes are made

The Country Housewife's Family Companion by William Ellis, 1750

Background

Pancakes, in one form or another, have been around for millennia, with recipes being found among the Romans and Greeks. They have been made with corn, wheat, rye, and buckwheat, contain yeast or be unleavened, be thick or thin. Some are made with water, others milk, or ale. Long before they were considered breakfast food they may be eaten for dinner or dessert. While today's North American pancakes are light and fluffy, due to the development of baking powder in the 19th century, English pancakes are traditionally thin and unleavened. Common toppings included sugar, powdered sugar, or lemon juice.

Original Receipt

These are sometimes made, not only by the poorer Sort of People, but also by Farmers and Yeomens Wives, when Milk cannot be easily had; for although most Farmers and Yeomen keep Cows, they are not always in Milk, as being in Calf, or that they go, what we in Hertfordshire call, gress or dry: In this Case Milk may be supplied by the Use of Small-Beer, or better with Ale; but whenever either of these are wanted, it should be of the mildest newest Sort, and free from the bitter Taste of Hops. Then mix this Liquor with Wheat-Flower, a few beaten Eggs, Sugar, and Ginger, and fry it into Pancakes with Lard or other Fat. I must own, that a Pancake made with Malt Liquor is not so palatable as one made with Milk; but where the Bellyful is most consulted, it will do well enough.

Ingredients

Amount

Flour	2 cups
Ginger	1 t
Egg	2
Ale	1 or 2 cups
Butter for frying	

Directions

Combine the dry ingredients. Add the eggs and about half the ale. Stir this until the batter is well incorporated, albeit thick. Continue to add additional ale, whisk well, until the batter is slightly thicker than heavy cream.

Heat a frying pan over medium heat and melt about 1/2 to 1 T of butter. (Some of the old recipes suggest coating the pan with clarified butter, then pouring any excess butter out before adding the batter.)

Ladle in about 1/4 cup of the batter. Cook for a minute or two until the pancake is golden brown on the bottom side. Flip and cook for about 30 seconds. Repeat.