

KJØTTKAKER ◇

I was watching Andrew Zimmern on the Travel Channel's Delicious Destinations one night, featuring the foods of Norway. My ears perked up when they mentioned what, to me, was an obscene expression that named one of Norway's traditional dishes. They repeated the obscenity several times while describing its contents, usage, and traditions. It was spelled Kjøttkaker. Curiously, I whipped out my smart phone and looked it up. The pronunciation is roughly *zhyet cockah*, and its meaning literally is just "meat cake."

Kjøttkaker are Norwegian meatballs, traditionally all-beef, flavorful, somewhat salty, and served with brown gravy. Like all classic dishes, every Norwegian family has a slightly different version, and everyone's mother always makes the best. The one below approximates that described by Zimmern.

1 cup nonfat milk
¾ cup bread crumbs¹
2 eggs, lightly beaten
½ tsp "salt"
1 tsp ground pepper
½ tsp ground nutmeg
½ tsp ground ginger
½ tsp allspice (do not omit!)
1 pound lean ground beef
½ pound ground pork
lingonberry jam or red currant jelly

The Gravy

8 tbsp "butter", divided
½ cup flour
4 cups unsalted beef stock
¼ cup sour cream
"salt" and pepper, to taste

¹I used dried low-carb tortillas, crumbled in a food processor.

Put the milk and bread crumbs in a large mixing bowl. Whisk in the eggs and spices using a hand mixer at medium speed. Add the ground meats and mix until all ingredients are well combined. Do not compact the mixture but try for a lighter meatball rather than a denser one.

Use a meatball press, if you have one, or just form the meat mixture into golf-ball-sized portions. In a large skillet or Dutch oven over medium heat, melt half the "butter" and lightly sauté the meatballs, turning until they are browned on all sides, yet are not quite cooked through. You may need to work in several batches. Once all the meatballs have been browned remove them from pan and set aside while you prepare the gravy.

Into the same skillet or Dutch oven, add the remaining "butter" over medium-low heat. Stir in the flour to make a roux and allow to cook for a minute or so until the roux is blonde in color. Then slowly whisk the stock into the roux. Once the roux is incorporated into the broth, turn the heat up to medium and add the meatballs back into the pan and cook for about 20 minutes over medium heat until the meatballs are cooked through. The gravy should come to a boil and thicken as the meatballs simmer. If the gravy is too thick, add a little more stock (or water) to thin it to the desired consistency. If it is too thin, extend the cooking time to reduce it to the desired consistency.

Once your desired consistency is reached, remove the pan from the heat and whisk in the sour cream (see notes). Taste the sauce and adjust your seasonings to your desired tastes.

Serve with seasonal vegetables and Lingonberry jam.

Makes about 12 to 15 meatballs.