

Falafel

Notes

This recipe is based primarily on Tommy Tsatsaroni's recipe, as heard on NPR's "All Things Considered" on August 1, 1999 and published here: <http://www.npr.org/programs/watc/recipes/nycfalafel.html>. Tsatsaroni has a falafel cart on the southwest corner of Sixth Ave. and 55th St. in Manhattan. I have made some modifications to the recipe based on reading other recipes and doing my own testing.

--Jeremy
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Equipment

- A fryer or heavy pan. I use a wok.
- A ladle. I use an Asian skimmer, pictured at right.
- A candy/frying thermometer which reads up to at least 400 degrees F.
- A container in which to discard the used frying oil.
- Paper towels
- A baking sheet



Ingredients

for the
falafel
balls

- 2 C dried chickpeas/garbanzos . If you try to use canned chickpeas you will end up with a frying pan full of chickpea sludge rather than falafel balls.
- 1 T ground cumin
- 1 head of garlic (or about 10 cloves), minced
- 1 C stemmed parsley, chopped
- 1 C cilantro leaves, chopped
- 1/2 C extra virgin olive oil
- 1/4 C white vinegar
- 1 T salt
- 1/2 t ground black pepper
- One or more binding agents to hold the falafel balls together. I have found success using 2 T flour and 1 beaten egg. Too much binding can make the falafel balls dense.
 - Up to 3 T tahini (sesame paste)
 - Up to 3 T flour
 - Up to 2 eggs, beaten
- A pinch of cayenne pepper. This is optional.
- Enough refined corn oil to fill the fryer about 2 inches deep. Unrefined corn oil is cheaper, but will smoke at too low a temperature to fry with. Refined corn oil is the typical Wesson stuff in the supermarket.

for the
tahini
dressing

- tahini
- plain yogurt
- water
- lemon juice
- dried mint
- minced garlic
- ground cumin
- salt
- pepper

for the pita
sandwiches

- pita
- tomatoes
- lettuce
- cucumbers
- sprouts

Preparing the falafel

Soften the chickpeas until they are "mashable" using one of these methods:

1. Soak the chickpeas in water for 24 hours in a covered bowl in the refrigerator.
2. Soak the chickpeas in water for 1 _ hours and then boil until just soft enough.

Hold a small amount of chickpeas in reserve. Combine all of the remaining falafel ingredients (except the corn oil) into a bowl and mix well. Make sure to squeeze all of the water out of the parsley and cilantro after rinsing. Excess water will make the falafel balls fall apart.

Blend the ingredients in a food processor. To quote from Tommy's recipe: "Blend until the mixture forms a coarse, moist paste. You want lots of tiny pieces of chickpeas, not a smooth mush. At this stage, the paste should be wet enough that you can squeeze the paste into [a ball], but it should be dry enough that only a little paste sticks to your fingers." If it's too wet, add the reserved chickpeas. If it's too dry, add some more oil or water. Refrigerate the paste for 1/2 to 1 hour.

Before frying, change into clothes that you won't mind smelling like grease until they're washed. Heat the corn oil until it is 375 degrees F. Use the thermometer to verify the temperature. As Tommy says, "if the oil is too cool, the falafel will come out greasy instead of crisp." Oil can catch on fire if it gets too hot. If it does catch, turn off the heat and cover the pan with the baking sheet. Don't put water on the fire!

Form the falafel paste into balls about 1 inch in diameter. Roll the balls between the palms of your hands to develop a smooth surface. (Just pressing the balls together isn't enough.)

Drop some balls into the oil. Don't put so many in that the temperature of the oil drops. I find that 3 to 4 balls at once is the maximum on my stove. Let them fry until they are a deep golden brown. This takes about 4 minutes for me. When they are done, lift them out with a ladle, let oil drain back into the fryer, and then place the balls on a cookie sheet lined with paper towels to drain some more. (Oil used for frying has a lifespan. The first falafel balls you fry in new oil won't be that great because the oil is too young. After that, the oil will be better for frying. If you fry too much in the oil, it will get too old, but that won't happen with this small recipe.) In between batches, I usually fish out any falafel bits that broke off and sunk to the bottom of the fryer. I also wait a minute between batches to let the oil heat back up to the correct temperature.

You can keep the balls warm in the oven for a little while if you need to.

Mix together all of the tahini ingredients. Serve in a pita with tahini sauce and vegetables such as tomatoes, lettuce, cucumbers, and sprouts.