

HOW TO PREPARE FOOLPROOF LUTEFISK FROM STOCK COD

A number of folks (two) have been after me to provide an authentic recipe for preparing foolproof lutefisk, (Norwegian soul food).

This recipe is a good companion to the foolproof lefse formula that I shared with you last.

Before I show the recipe I should point out my irritation with kinsmen who have taken on themselves the task of besmirching lutefisk. Implying that the kong (king) became ill after only a dozen consecutive lutefisk dinners on his last state visit to our American capital territory (Minnesota), is blasphemy of the first rank. Lutefisk needs no help. It can stand alone and sometimes does. Furthermore, it is a little known fact that the word "uff-da", supposedly from the old Viking tongue, is of American origin and is the usual grunt from a person first exposed to the lovely aroma of well-cured lutefisk.

This authentic recipe was mind carried from Norway in about 1885 and has been passed on by word of mouth or in Ny Norsk. It was translated, at our request, in 1975, to Oregonian-American. It has never before been committed to print. The actual source is from the late Anna Aamodt-Stegen, whose parents settled in the Mist, Oregon, area. Anna, besides being my favorite mother-in-law, was the consummate lutefisk preparer and cook. Until late in life, she faithfully put the stockfish to soak in early December, preparing an ample amount for a large family, in-laws and friends. Ample means enough for several feasts! HERE'S HOW:

1. Buy dry codfish. (Dry means as hard as a baseball bat.) Obtain this fish from Norway. (But I've decided that there are enough Norwegians in Alaska now to be able to prepare the stock fish. Out here, Alaska is the best source, through your local fish distributor.)
2. Bend dry fish to fit crock. (Now that may take some doing.) Then take the fish out. A 10 gallon crock will hold about 4 fish (8 sides).
3. Dissolve, in boiling water, 3 tablespoons of lye for each fish (2 sides). Use an enamel container, if available. Pour this solution into crock.
4. Add cold water to fill the crock to the 2/3rds level. Then add stock fish and fill remainder of space with cold water (to cover fish).
5. Cover and let stand for 5 days, keeping fish under water. Add additional cold water as necessary. (Stir, occasionally, to insure a well-mixed solution).
6. Drain off all lye water (dispose carefully). Refill with cold water, changing water every day for ten days. Make sure that fish is covered with water (as this flushing process occurs).

Now, you are ready to prepare for the table:

7. Trim any obvious bone, skin, or waste. Tie lutefisk portions (1/2 pound or so) in cheesecloth. Cook, in rapidly boiling salted water for about 5 minutes. (Properly prepared and cooked fish will be flaky, not gelatinous, and have a very mild taste).

8. Drain and serve on a heated platter. Cook in small batches so that hot fish is continuously available.
9. One fish will serve 8 normal persons or 3 to 4 LL's (lutefisk lunatics).
10. Serve with melted butter, flatbrod, lefse, mashed potatoes, etc. (Some ethnic throwbacks are alleged to put cream sauce on lutefisk rather than clarified butter. Seems hard to believe).
11. After 5 or 6 large helpings of lutefisk, some diners enjoy a contest. One of my favorites is to construct a sandwich with flatbrod on top and bottom and generous helpings of lutefisk, mashed potatoes and butter layered in between. Judges are carefully selected from among the LL's, of course. The winner is awarded another plate of lutefisk, and an extra lefse!
12. As we near the 21st century, you may be interested in a lutefisk "speed feed". In that case, purchase ready to go lutefisk from experienced "mongers" in centers such as Astoria, Eugene, Portland or Ballard. To cook this fish: wrap loosely in plastic and zap at full speed for 3 to 5 minutes in the microwave. It isn't great this way, but there is no such thing as "bad" lutefisk.

W. Q. Wick, 3740 NW Hayes, Corvallis, OR 97330-1750, Agent for the writer Quent Slettedal, of the same address.
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