

Got leftovers? Make some fritters

by Sabine Eiche

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Aunt Sara and I were plucking blueberries when she confessed that her favourite columns were those in which I mention food. Great! I'm as interested in food as I am in words, and here was encouragement to blend the two.

I lost no time. It was August, and I'd recently come across an inspiring recipe in *The New York Times* for leek-vegetable fritters.

The word fritters has both a culinary and non-culinary significance. It can mean, in the second instance, fragments or shreds, and is synonymous with flitters and fitters, which may be related to "Fetzen," the German word for shreds.

"Frigere," the Latin verb to fry, is at the root of culinary fritters, an endlessly versatile dish that's been popular throughout history. In early English cookbooks, fritters might also be called froise or fraise, which derive from the same Latin verb.

Traditionally, fritters were portions of meat or fruit, dipped in batter and fried in oil or lard. A French cookbook by the sixteenth-century Lancelot de Casteau, addressed to ladies who liked to cook, includes recipes for cream-puff pastry used for fritters. The Victorian Mrs. Beeton gives numerous recipes for fritters, savoury and sweet. Her batter, which seems almost more important than the filling, consists of flour, butter, salt, eggs and milk. She recommends lard or clarified dripping for frying.

Fritters are related to frittata, defined as "an Italian dish made with fried beaten eggs, resembling a Spanish omelet," a description that would put me off frittata forever. Instead, frittata is a delightful, delicious and digestible dish about which the Florentine cook Fabio Picchi has waxed eloquently.

Picchi is the owner of Il Cibreo, an extraordinary restaurant in Florence. He'd occasionally appear on TV and with customary panache demonstrate how to transform the simplest ingredients into mouth-watering fare. I'll never forget his frittata made of leftovers. He took the previous day's pasta with meat sauce, some cooked green beans, and whatever else was at hand, tossed all into a bowl, into which he then broke several eggs, mixing everything a few times and finally sliding the mass into hot olive oil in a frying pan. Frittata is a superb way to revamp (a word, curiously, originating with shoe repair) scraps of food.

I modified the fritters recipe in *The New York Times*, with good results: to approximately 2 cups of vegetables, thinly sliced or cut in strips (cooked cauliflower, cooked potatoes, cooked beets, raw green onions in one version; cooked potatoes, raw beet tops, raw green onions in another; cooked potatoes, raw zucchini, raw green onions in a third) I added $\frac{1}{4}$ cup flour, whisked together with $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt, $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking powder and freshly ground pepper. Having tossed everything with a fork to distribute the flour evenly, I added 1 large beaten egg, mixing thoroughly – and patiently – until all flour was absorbed by the egg. In a frying pan I heated olive oil until it began to ripple, then I reduced the heat to medium-low.

Although fritters are typically fried by the spoonful, I opted for one big fritter in an 8-inch pan, flipping it over with the help of two plates. Bon appétit, Aunt Sara!