

# JUDY'S MATZO BALLS

Cooking time: Forever it seems,  
but only 3 hours

## Instructions

"It's my signature dish!" Judy announces with pride when speaking of her matzo ball soup. These are not idle words or crude conceit. She makes it for Passover, for Rosh Hashanah and by special request. Tasters, can and will, attest that this is indeed savory manna from heaven.

Personally, I have been previously privileged, devouring it on two occasions AND have been honored with leftovers. Leftovers are reserved only for the precious because, as Judy says: "Everyone wants them."

I was so curious and so inspired that I undertook a voyage of discovery traveling from Marin County to Seattle, Washington to learn more about this dish. The occasion was a Passover Seder. The star of the Seder was the



soup and I would be there from its very inception to learn all of the steps to make the best matzo balls that anyone has ever eaten.

The journey was by car, by SUV more precisely, because the equipment necessary for implementation had to travel along. The back seat was loaded with the implements that make it all possible. There were three large pots, with their matching lids, mixing bowls, big wooden spoons, spatula, knives, tongs, tens of Telma cubes, measuring cups, spoons and plastic containers of all sizes, (mostly huge) dishtowels, and ladles. And remember these were just the non perishables.

This soup is not something that is whipped up at the last minute. It is essential to begin days in advance. So upon arriving in Seattle one of the first tasks was to shop for the perishable ingredients for the potion. Fortunately there is a QFC Market in University Village where all of the Orthodox Jews shop. There is a Kosher meat market, and special sections with foods for Passover. After about an hour of intensive shopping we were ready to begin the process which would take over three days.

If you are reading this expecting to come up with the recipe to make Judy's balls you can stop here. Actually, the recipe is on the back of the box of Manischewitz ("quality since 1888") Matzoh Meal. The ingredients are listed:

2 Tbsp. vegetable oil

2 large eggs, slightly beaten

1/2 cup Manischewitz Matzo Meal

2 Tbsp. Manischewitz broth or water

1 tsp. salt, if desired

So it's not the recipe, it's something else. I was there to crack the mystery. Judy hinted that there were improvisations.

I learned that the first step is to make the matzo ball batter. Does this step entail improvisations? Well, yes. The secret is that Judy separates some, but not all of the eggs and beats the reserved egg whites until they form peaks and then fold them into the batter. The ratio? "Whatever 14 out of 32 is, you do the math." The recipe, you will note calls for water or Manischewitz broth. Instead Judy makes a paste of Telma chicken cubes and water to give better flavor. For the neophytes Telma chicken cubes are made in Isreal, but for convenience sake, sold at most Safeways. The batter, after carefully folding in the beaten egg whites, is placed into one of the huge plastic containers and refrigerated for at least two to three hours, but preferably longer, usually overnight.

The next day dawns. Not the day of the main event but one or two days before. On this day the balls are formed and cooked. The balls are not exactly formed. Judy does not methodically make the batter into balls, she prefers them to look homemade. So she wets her hands, uses her fingers and



just drops them into the boiling liquid. So technically it's not formed matzo ball soup, it's matzo big lump soup. However, she has not changed the name of the dish, for obvious reasons.

I was surprised to learn that the cooking of the matzo balls is an entirely separate process from the preparation of the soup. We are not there yet, or even close. Will this ever end?

Let's take a break from all the work and talk about the history of the perfection of this dish.

What was your first memory of matzo ball soup? "I have to think about that. I guess when I was about ten. I remember watching my mother make it."

Was it good? "It was delicious"

Is it different from yours, the one you make today? "Her balls were a little heavier, a little harder on the inside then mine are now. Mine are a little bigger and a good consistency between soft and hard because I separate the egg whites."

When did you start making them on your own and adding your own touches? "I guess I was about 23 and living in Urbana Champagne where the University of Illinois is located. I was married and I made the matzo ball soup for Passover. I remember calling my mother who was living in Des Plaines, Ill. a suburb of Chicago. I felt a sense of pride, that this was a rite of passage. I hadn't started to refine the recipe. That came later, years later."

When did y

ou begin to improvise, to make it your signature dish? "That's a good question because I don't really know the answer. It had to be when I was in my thirties.

I know that because I was making my own recipe when Aaron was born in 1988."

Did you make it for his Bris, I ask, eager to show off my new knowledge of Jewish traditions "No, it was catered and besides that you do not have matzo ball soup at a Bris. But I do remember making it for Passover when Aaron was a baby."

But back to work. The soup itself. Judy's refinements are based on the following principle. "I hate a fatty soup, so I never cook a whole chicken to make the broth. I use skinless breasts and thighs and take off the excess fat. I enhance the flavor adding the Telma chicken cubes. For vegetables I use carrots, celery, leeks and parsley. I use a whole white onion but take it out early so it doesn't make things bitter. Add a pinch of garlic, salt and pepper. That way the soup is the way I like it, flavorful, meaty but not fatty."

Writer's Note: I was done in at this point. I was up to my elbows in chicken fat. The day before I was stripping chicken fat from chicken pieces to make the smaltz for chopped liver. Today I was stripping chicken fat from chicken pieces to discard it. This made no sense and it is a thankless job, but somebody has to do it

How long do you cook the soup? "Until the chicken is done, about an hour, but it needs to simmer beyond an hour to get the intensity of the flavor. But the moment of consumption has not yet arrived. The soup is refrigerated overnight.

Writer's Note: So not only do you need a lot of big pots with lids and big plastic containers with lids you also need a really big refrigerator, preferably two.

The day of consumption had arrived. The chicken soup was taken out of the refrigerator in the early a.m. to Bring it to room temperature. The soup went into one of the large pots. The matzo balls were carefully placed on top of the soup and the soup was brought to a simmer over a low heat"

"I serve the soup with the matzo ball being the center of the universe. It should cover the entire surface of the soup and be as big as the bowl. "Big,



puffy, soft and hard at the same time. So that's it.

You figure out your own formula of who gets the leftovers. With Judy it's the "precious". You could try a lottery system, pick straws, or auction them off. Think ahead, you will be way too tired to come up with something original at the time.

This recipe will only be released to a select few but it is highly unlikely that there will be a rush on matzo ball soup cookery. Matzo ball soup necessitates so much preparation that it requires an extremely high level of

motivation or being chained in the kitchen. Chaining someone in the kitchen is not exactly in the spirit of Passover.

The secret of matzo ball soup is the Jewish tradition itself. It is warmth, soul, depth and intensity. Without these essential ingredients matzo Judy's balls would be flat and tasteless; the Seder cold and lifeless.