

Dave's Omelet Tutorial



A lot of people like omelets, and there are literally thousands of restaurants in Michigan that serve probably hundreds of different varieties of omelets. It's one thing to order a nice one from a restaurant, and another entirely to make restaurant-quality omelets at home. But really, it's not all that difficult. There are a few tricks to it that, once you know them and keep them in mind, will help you make a fluffy yellow omelet every time. And as for variations, there are simply no limits to them. A sour cream and dill omelet with crab?? Absolutely! At the end of this tutorial, you'll find something very special ... complete instructions for making a Tortilla Española, an authentic Spanish omelet. This Spanish omelet is unlike any Mexican tortilla you've ever had and is oh, so good!



I've been making omelets since I was probably 12 years old. I'd always liked ordering them in restaurants, but mom didn't really know how to make them. And even back then, I was watching Graham "The Galloping Gourmet" Kerr make them on TV, using whole milk, all the oils and butter ... the things that make "real" cooking *real*. Looking it up in mom's "standard" cookbook, something called the "Ladies' Home Companion", it seemed a simple-enough process. But of course, the first ones I made came out extra-crispy on the outside and raw on the inside. Once I got the cooktime and temperature nailed down, mom bought me one of those folding omelet pans, something I still have. I rarely use it, although my kids like to give it a whirl now and then.

I've had omelets literally everywhere, from diner-style grilled-and-triple-folded "flat-packs" at countless Waffle Houses, to a personalized omelet cooked by a chef at a breakfast buffet at the Hamilton Princess Hotel in Hamilton, Bermuda, to another chef and another buffet at an Easter morning breakfast at the Sheraton Hotel in Abu Dhabi, UAE, to omelets at the former 777 Pine restaurant in the Grand Hyatt Hotel in Seattle, to, yes, a sour cream and dill omelet at a Café Marie's in Toledo, Ohio. The ones at 777 Pine in Seattle had eggs so perfectly-shaped and flat, the eggs looked as though they'd been stamped from a dense yellow foam rubber, but tasted rather "flat". I found out later there are ways of making steamed omelet eggs so they're absolutely perfect in color and texture with zero wrinkles. Sorry, that's cheating ...

Omelets in Michigan seem to have a style all their own. The

majority are made from three eggs, unless you're at a place like Tony's off I-75 in Birch Run, where you'll find six-egg omelets. The basics are available on most menus, such as ham & cheese, western-style, various "farmer's" omelets, and the like. There are also some variations that started as odd ideas, such as seafood omelets, available at places like Sophia's family-style restaurant in my hometown of Grand Blanc, that are now acceptable to a lot of people. Scrambler Marie's (aka Café Marie's), a Toledo-based breakfast and lunch chain with a location in Temperance, Michigan, offers an omelet named Surf's Up, which is filled with crab, cream cheese and dill. But because of how Midwesterners like their food, even these omelets are hearty meals that may even last someone through lunchtime and into the evening. Just add hash browns and some warm biscuits and butter (no gravy on those biscuits, thank you) and you'll have some rather satisfied and comfortable people.

Most folks don't have a grill at home to make diner-style omelets. But while diner-style omelets are fun to make, you just can't fill them as thickly as an omelet cooked in a decent pan. And that's part of the whole trick: Ya' gotta have a decent pan. If you don't, you may as well make scrambled eggs since that's what you'll end up with anyway. Look for something labeled as an "omelet pan" (not one of the folding ones) 8" or 9" in diameter. Don't get a stamped pan, such as those thin ones with the copper on the bottom (apologies to Paul Revere and his wonderful *RevereWare*). Make sure there's a decent thickness to the pan itself that will distribute the heat across the whole omelet. Of course, if the coating starts get-

ting scratched, you should stop using it for omelets as they'll start becoming scrambled eggs again.

Omelets can be expensive in some restaurants depending on not only what you get, but also who makes it (a chef vs. a line cook) and the location (the Hamilton Princess Hotel in Bermuda vs. Sophia's in Grand Blanc). For home cooks, it's not necessary to go overboard on the cost of ingredients. However, it is important to have fresh, quality ingredients. *Real* farm-fresh eggs seem to cook up better than some brand name eggs that may have been sitting for a while. National-brand olive oil is certainly preferable to most store brands. (Whole Foods Market is one of many exceptions to this.) Butcher shop and deli-grade meats and cheeses are preferable but they're not necessary. Any *decent* meats and cheeses will work well. It's important to get the freshest vegetables and spices. Anything less will certainly affect flavor.



Here's the basic recipe for a cheese omelet. This may look like a lot of work, but it's not. The whole point of all these instructions is to make a simple process for making fluffy yellow omelets highly repeatable.

Ingredients

3 large eggs (if you're gonna use "egg substitutes", please use someone else's recipe ...)
 Milk (not that wimpy skim stuff ... that ain't milk ... 2% or higher milkfat for a decent omelet, please)
 Kosher or sea salt (they just taste better than iodized)
 Fancy shredded cheddar cheese (low fat ... not! Get some *real* cheese.)
 Extra-virgin olive oil OR non-stick spray

Equipment

1 small mixing bowl and 1 fork or small whisk
 OR
 1 countertop milkshake-style beverage mixer
 1 8" or 9" thick-wall non-stick omelet pan
 1 large spatula
 1 toaster

On an electric stove, pick a burner at least the size of the bottom of the pan. (With gas stoves, it doesn't matter.) Also put some bread in the toaster but don't start it.

If Using A Mixing Bowl: Crack the eggs into the mixing bowl (make sure the bowl's a bit oversized or the eggs will spill out when whipped) and whip them rapidly with a fork or small whisk till the eggs foam. Pour in a little of the milk (about 1/4 cup, but I never measure) and whip again until foamy. **If Using A Beverage Mixer:** Crack the eggs into the mixer's metal cup, attach it to the mixer and whip them *very gently*. Pour in a little of the milk (about 1/4 cup, but I never measure) and whip again *but not by much*. You don't want foamy eggs or the liquid won't move correctly in the pan.

One of the most important concepts we want you to learn from these pages about omelets is that it's possible to make beautiful fluffy *yellow* omelets each and every time in your home kitchen, just like the pros do in countless restaurants. And that this is quite easy to do with very little practice. What you do with this in learning our variations and creating your own styles is entirely up to you.

Notes:

- *Omelets cooked using olive oil to coat the pan will stay extremely hot for quite some time. If you're able to cook omelets this way, make sure you let folks know how hot it will be so no one gets burned.*

Notes:

- *Lifting the omelet and getting the raw egg mixture to flow underneath is exactly why a hinged "omelet pan" isn't something that works well. But, if ya' like 'em crusty, go for it.*
- *Dave's sister Barb likes using salad seasoning on her eggs, which is a great flavor. If you want an even better flavor, use a liberal amount of the Farm Market Salad Seasoning from the Alden Mill House in Alden, Michigan or at their web site, alden-millhouse.com. It's incredibly good.*

For Non-Stick Spray: Even though you're using a non-stick pan, you should still spray it with a non-stick spray, coating the inside completely. Place the pan on the burner, set the burner for medium-high and let the pan warm up. **For Extra-Virgin Olive Oil:** Heat the pan on medium-high heat. When the pan is hot, go twice-around with extra-virgin olive oil, then tilt the pan to cover the bottom and up the sides of the pan a bit. Let the pan and oil finish warming up.

When the pan is heated completely (the spray will barely begin to smoke or the oil will seem to be a smaller puddle), dump the egg mixture in, in one complete motion. This will instantly create a thin base layer from which the rest will cook. Sprinkle with a bit of Kosher or sea salt all across the eggs if desired. As the mixture cooks, use the large spatula almost continuously to move the cooked mixture toward the center, creating large wrinkles.

At the same time (this is the key step here), almost constantly lift the cooked areas all around the pan so raw egg mixture re-coats the *entire* underside of what's cooking. This prevents any one area from cooking too long, which will turn the outside of the omelet brown, crispy and unappetizing. (The picture to the right shows what happens when you don't lift the whole thing.) Once the egg mixture is a little more than half cooked, start the toaster.



When most of the egg is cooked and there is a somewhat thin layer of raw egg left on top of the cooked portion, *remove the pan from the heat*. Sprinkle shredded cheese across half the omelet. Use the large spatula to fold the half that's not covered with cheese onto the half that's covered with cheese. Let the omelet sit for about a half-a-minute, then slide it onto the plate.

Serve with the toast, covered with butter and jelly.

Omelet Variations

These are some standard variations, along with some not-so-standard ones. You can easily modify these to make your own creations.

Ham & Cheese Omelet

Add about 4 ounces good ham (not processed ham), cubed rather small (1/8 to 1/4"), just prior to adding the cheese. Serve with toast, butter and jelly, and hash browns.

Polish Omelet (for Mary)

Break up a good hand-made Polish sausage and boil it in beer. (Miller Lite's fine, but an authentic Lager is way better.) At the same time, slice and sauté some potatoes with some chopped onions in either real butter or extra virgin olive oil. When the sausage is done, drain the excess beer. (Yeah, go ahead and drink it ...) When assembling the layers in the egg, start with the sausage, then add a layer of the potatoes and onions, and top with Provolone or Swiss cheese. Serve

with homemade bread with lots of butter or, better yet, buttermilk biscuits with butter.

Farmer's Omelet (for Dad)

Make a Western omelet, but also add sliced potatoes to the sautéing. (Young red potatoes are great here.) Then, just before adding the cheese, also add tomato slices or halved cherry tomatoes. Serve with Texas Toast with lots of butter or, better yet, buttermilk biscuits with butter.

Western Omelet

Slice a couple ounces of raw mushrooms and chop about a quarter of a medium sweet red onion. Sauté these in a couple tablespoons extra virgin olive oil or salted unsweetened

butter until the onions are semi-transparent. Drain the excess oils. Chop about 1/4 of a green bell pepper. When it's time to add the cheese to the omelet, add the chopped green pepper, sautéed onions and mushrooms, about 4 ounces good ham cubed rather small (1/8 to 1/4"), and then the cheese. Serve with Texas Toast with lots of butter or, buttermilk biscuits with butter, and either home fries or oven-roasted potatoes.

Mexican Omelet

Fill with a thick layer of freshly-made taco meat, and a layer of sliced jalapeño peppers prior to adding the cheese, which in this case should be a Mexican cheese mixture. Once the omelet is plated, top it with a line of chunky salsa down its length, a dollop or two of good sour cream, and another light sprinkle of cheese. Serve with thickly-sliced garlic toast and some warm corn cake.

Salmon Omelet

Add a layer of shredded broiled salmon and a thin layer of sour cream prior to adding the cheese, which in this case should be a thinly-sliced Swiss or provolone (not shredded). Serve with a toasted English muffin topped with butter and orange marmalade, and hash browns.

Greek Omelet

Start as with the Polish omelet, substituting veal sausage, and prep the potatoes and onions the same way. (Sure, guzzle the drained beer when the sausage is done ...) When assembling the layers in the egg, then add a layer of the po-

tatoes and onions, some chopped mild banana peppers, a sprinkling of chopped black olives, and crumbled feta cheese. Serve with flat bread and hummus. Oompah!

Vegetarian Omelet

A layer of sautéed mushrooms and sweet red onion (as in the Western omelet), a layer of a mix of green, red and yellow bell pepper, a layer of broccoli and cauliflower, chopped small (heavy on the cauliflower), some chopped mild banana peppers, a sprinkling of chopped black olives, a layer of tomato slices or halved cherry tomatoes, and cheese if desired. Serve with a whole wheat or grain bread and a yogurt-based spread.

Dave's Fave Omelet

A layer of sautéed mushrooms and sweet red onion (as in the Western omelet), a layer of a mix of green, red and yellow bell pepper, a layer of browned ground maple sausage, a layer of good cubed ham, a layer of sliced mild banana peppers, and a layer of a store-bought shredded 3- or 4-cheese mix. Top the folded omelet with a dollop or two of good sour cream. Serve with a toasted English muffin topped with butter and orange marmalade, and either home fries or oven-roasted potatoes.

More About Omelet Pans ...

A pan for a good omelet needs to be a real pan. Something solid, and sturdy, preferably multiple layers of alloy with a good non-stick surface and a solid handle. The question we get is, why not use one of those folding pans? Actually, we have two of those, the original one Dave's mom bought him decades ago, and a newer one of the same thing given to Dave by his kids for Christmas one year. This latter pan is what you'll see in a picture on the page for poached eggs toward the beginning of this chapter. If you try to move the eggs in one of these folding pans, you'll find it to be more than difficult because of the straight-wall sides of the pan. Try to pick the pan up while lifting the omelet so raw egg will run underneath, and the other side of the pan will flop. The omelet will most likely be brown and crispy on the outside, which a lot of people won't like in a normal omelet. If you get one of these pans, make sure it has the right attachments so you can use it for poaching eggs vs. making omelets. It won't cost you too much more to also get a decent pan for omelets. Your breakfast guests will thank you.

Tortilla Española, An Authentic Spanish Omelet

Marta Cruz-Sojo, Student, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Marta is an artist, student, and elementary Spanish instructor at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. A proud Andalusian (from the Andalusia province of Spain), she offers this authentic Spanish omelet recipe from her homeland. Marta explains: "Tortilla is probably the most typical dish (as popular as paella) from Spain. Not from Mexico!! Mexican tortilla is something completely different, as you know. We share the name, not the concept. I usually use the plate of the flipping to present the tortilla cooked because I love the smudgy left over egg uncooked on the bottom, but some people hate it, so you can use another plate. Usually we cut it in triangles, like if you were to cut a cake so it is a great 'tapa' You can eat it right away or eat it cold. As you like. Some people add mayo or other sauces, I don't. Up to you."



Ingredients

5 large yellow potatoes (get some that have a well-worn look)
 5-6 eggs
 1 Tbs heavy whipping cream
 Vegetable oil, enough for deep-frying
 Kosher or sea salt
 Optional: onions, garlic, peppers, tuna, any left over meat...

Equipment

1 deep 9" skillet
 1 deep fryer (optional)
 2 large plates
 1 large glass bowl
 1 fork or small whisk

Peel the potatoes and slice them *as thin as you can cut them*. Put some paper towel or cheesecloth on one plate and set it aside. Add enough oil to the skillet or deep fryer so the potatoes will be completely covered, and heat the oil to 350 degrees F. (Use a thermometer and actually measure this or it won't work correctly.) If you're adding onions and/or peppers, cut them up as well. Fry the potatoes, and possibly the onions and peppers, until the potatoes are gold-colored but not crispy. Remove the potatoes and any vegetables from the oil and dump them onto the lined plate to let them drain.

If you're also adding garlic, crush it and sauté it separately.

Wait about 5 minutes after removing the potatoes and any vegetables to the plate for draining. If you don't wait, the hot potatoes will cook the eggs when you mix them, so be sure to wait. (Marta kicks back with a cigarette or glass of wine here.) Crack the eggs into the bowl and whip them with a fork or small whisk. Add the heavy whipping cream and a sprinkling of salt and whip it again. Fold the potatoes and any vegetables (including any sautéed garlic) into the mixture in the bowl, making sure everything ends up completely coated with the mixture. If adding meat, tuna, etc., add them and fold them into the mixture.

Heat the skillet over medium heat until it's warm, then add a couple tablespoons oil. Once the oil is hot, dump the mixture from the bowl to the skillet. Let it cook for 10 to 15 minutes. When you can move the tortilla in the fry pan (like a French pancake) that means it's ready to be flipped over to the other side. To flip this beast (this is the decisive moment), cover the skillet with a clean plate, hold the handle of the skillet with your dominant hand, hold the plate strongly with the other hand, and just flip it all over. Slide the tortilla from the plate back into the skillet again to cook the other side.

Let the tortilla cook for 10 more minutes, flip it onto the plate as you did before, and it's ready to serve.