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# Rabbis have final word on what's kosher for Passover

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of The Dallas Morning News

Imagine the scene described in the Bible in Exodus 12. The Israelites have been told to be ready to leave Egypt in a hurry, so they have a chance to rise.

What do you think that bread looked like? A chewy, overly fat pita, maybe. Or perhaps a crunchy, lavashlike cracker thing.

So why does just about every piece of matzo you'll see this Passover look like construction material? Uniform in size, rectangular, scored with perforations into a corrugated cracker, modern matzo looks like processed food, not a key element in a sacred meal.

Although it's true that modern machinery has changed matzo some, the 2000 version isn't that different from what Jews celebrated Passover with centuries ago, said Rabbi Yaakov Horowitz.

He ought to know. He's the rabbi's residence at Manischewitz, the world's biggest manufacturer of matzo. He's the man who certifies that products eaten by millions of Jews around the world meet the stringent Jewish dietary law.

Matzo is a Hebrew word that means "unleavened bread." The Bible commands Jews to commemorate the exodus from Egypt by eating matzo — and no leavened bread — for the eight days of Passover, which begins this year at sundown Wednesday.

For ritually observant Jews, it means that just about anything with a grain base that hasn't been rabbinically certified as suitable for Passover will be removed from the house for the eight days. And many recipes that use regular flour or bread will be rejiggered to use Passover matzo or matzo meal, which is nothing but ground-up Passover matzo.

To be really sure your matzo is officially kosher, you need a rabbi who is an expert in this sort of thing to certify the whole process.

The Manischewitz factory in Jersey City, N.J., which makes all kinds of non-Passover matzo and other foods the rest of the year, closes for a month for a complete cleaning before churning out tons of Passover products. Cooking equipment is literally taken apart and scoured before reassembly.

Which explains why just about everybody buys matzo, instead of making their own. But that does not explain why the product tends to look like the inside layer of corrugated cardboard. It looks like that partly to fulfill rabbinical directives and partly to meet the needs of modern technology.

The goal of many Passover rules is to make sure that the Passover flour touches no water until just before baking. Otherwise, there's a tiny risk that some wild yeast spore could wake up and begin fermenting.

The thinness and the perforated pattern of holes are to make sure the heat from the oven reaches every nook and cranny, so that there's no doubt that the moisture is completely baked out.

Cooks have developed ingenious ways to dress up what is an astonishingly bland, arid cracker. Matzo balls replace dumplings or



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The uniform holes in machine-made matzo help spread the heat through each piece to make sure moisture is completely baked out.

noodles in soup. Soak matzo in some water until just soft, drain, add eggs and pan-fry and it's matzo "bret," "French toast" for Passover.

My family separates a bunch of eggs, whips the whites into a frenzy, folds in the yolks and some matzo meal and fries the batter to create something a little like a soufflé that we call "feinkuchen."

Those beaten egg whites make the food rise as surely as any leavening. How is that allowed?

And how about many of Manischewitz's kosher-for-Passover processed mixes for cakes,

cookies and other goodies? One of the ingredients is baking soda. Isn't that a leavening agent?

It may look that way, Horowitz said. But appearances can deceive.

The rabbis decided that matzo once certified as kosher for Passover can never be de-Passoverized, not even by later contact with leavening. All of the Manischewitz mixes start with Passover matzo meal that can't be ritually contaminated by the baking soda.

"It's not a question of what it looks like," Horowitz said. "It's a question of what the rabbis call it."

## FRIEDA'S FANCY FEINKUCHEN

2 teaspoons butter, oil or nonstick cooking spray  
6 large eggs  
¼ cup crumbled matzo meal

2 teaspoons cinnamon  
Pinch of salt  
Sugar or maple syrup for serving

Before starting, prepare 2 large frying pans — one a little larger than the other. Using butter, oil or cooking spray, coat entire inner surface of both pans. Have the pans hot but not smoking.

Separate eggs, placing whites in large bowl. Beat whites until soft peaks form.

Beat yolks separately, then fold into whites. In separate bowl, mix matzo meal, cinnamon and salt. Fold dry ingredients into egg mixture. Make sure ingredients are evenly distributed — no lumps.

Pour batter into the smaller of the frying pans. Gently shake pan until batter is even. Use spatula to smooth the top if it's very uneven. Cook until bottom is golden brown.

Here's the hardest part: Take a knife or spatula and release the edges of the half-cooked batter. Take the larger pan, invert it and place it over the smaller pan. Carefully flip the 2 at the same time, so the batter falls into the larger pan. This takes manual dexterity and a well-greased pan to execute properly.

Cook until the other side is also golden brown, then release the edges with a knife or spatula and flip the pan over a plate large enough to hold the entire feinkuchen. Again, it should fall right out of the pan, if properly greased.

Slice into pie-shaped wedges. Sprinkle with granulated sugar. Or have maple syrup at the table. The texture should be firmer than a soufflé — cooked all the way through. Makes 4 large portions.

**NUTRITION DATA FOR SERVING:** 151 calories (57 percent fat), 1.0 g fat (4 g sat), 1 g fiber, 324 mg cholesterol, 187 mg sodium, 6 g carbohydrates, 52 mg calcium

## MATZO BREI

3 pieces of matzo  
2 large eggs  
Cinnamon

Salt and pepper to taste  
Butter for frying  
Maple syrup

Break matzo into pieces about twice the size of a quarter. Place in strainer. Pour boiling water over matzo, or use hot water from faucet, until matzo is softened but not mushy. Drain off any excess. Lightly beat eggs. Stir in matzo. Sprinkle with cinnamon. Add salt and pepper to taste.

Fry with butter until the egg is completely cooked. Some people add chopped onions to the cooking mixture.

Some people cook it in one piece, like an omelet, then turn it. My family stirs it around more like scrambled eggs. Serve with maple syrup. Makes 4 servings.

**NUTRITION DATA FOR SERVING:** 156 calories (28 percent fat), 5 g fat (2 g sat), 1 g fiber, 111 mg cholesterol, 129 mg sodium, 23 g carbohydrates, 21 mg calcium

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