

Semlor



Fat Tuesday Buns By Rob Hicks, freelance journalist

The Facts:

- Semla derives from the Latin *similia*, which means fine wheat flour.
- Records suggest semlor first became popular in Sweden in 1541
- Each Swede eats five semlor buns per year on average.
- The unofficial record for the largest semla is 160 kilos or about 340 pounds. It was made in Linköping in February 2001.
- King Adolf Fredrik died on February 12, 1771, after consuming a luxurious banquet rounded off with 14 servings of *hetvägg*, semla served in a warm bowl of milk.

February 5 this year is the last Tuesday before Lent, the 40-day period of fasting and penitence between Ash Wednesday and Easter in the Christian calendar. In Sweden it is known as *Fettisdagen*, meaning Fat Tuesday, the day when all fat and other perishables are traditionally consumed before Lent.

Sweden, in common with many other countries, has long marked the day with a sweet dish. But semla, a wheat-flour bun filled with almond paste and whipped cream, has arguably outgrown its religious symbolism. The plump cream filled buns traditionally eaten on Tuesdays begin appearing in shops as early as January 1. Fat Tuesday would be more aptly named fat January, February and March.

And it doesn't stop there. Swedish newspapers also get in on the act, with tasting surveys aimed at finding the best semla in town. Lisa Eisenman, one of the judges on the *Svenska Dagenbladet* panel and co-owner of the Cookbook Café in Jarlapan, central Stockholm, says, "I prefer semla that has a good balance between all three components: the almond paste, the cream and the bun. We also looked for well spread almond paste, moist bread, that sort of thing. "I don't know why semla is so important to the Swedes. Some things are just very Swedish and are taken very seriously. Everyone has their own way of eating semla and a tradition around it.

The Recipe:

Ingredients:

- *2 eggs*
- *2/3 cups of butter, melted*
- *1 1/2 cups warm milk*
- *1/2 tablespoon instant yeast*
- *5 cups all-purpose flour*
- *1/2 cups white sugar 1/2 teaspoon salt*
- *1 teaspoon ground cardamom*
- *1 cup all-purpose flour*
- *4 teaspoons baking powder*
- *1/2 cup milk or as needed*
- *5 ounces marzipan*
- *2 cups whipping cream 2 tablespoons white sugar*
- *Confectioners' sugar for dusting*

Directions:

- 1. In a large bowl, whisk together eggs with butter and milk. Sprinkle yeast overtop and allow to soften for 5 minutes. Meanwhile, sift together 5 cups flour with 1/2 cup sugar, salt and ground cardamom. Once yeast has softened, stir flour mixture into milk mixture until a soft dough forms. Cover bowl with a towel, and allow to rise in a warm spot for 30 minutes.*
- 2. Sift together flour and baking powder. Stir into risen dough, then knead until smooth. Form into 16 balls (or 24 if you like smaller semlor) and place on greased baking sheets. Cover with a towel, and allow to rise until double in bulk, 35 to 40 minutes.*
- 3. Preheat oven to 375 degrees F (190 degrees C).*
- 4. Bake in preheated oven 10 to 15 minutes until golden brown and the center has firmed. Cool buns on a wire rack back to room temperature.*
- 5. Once cool, cut a slice about 1/2 inch thick off of the top of the bun and set aside. Scoop or cut out the center of the buns, leaving a shell about 1/2 inch thick. Tear the removed bread into small pieces and place into a bowl. Moisten the bread with milk, and then mix in marzipan until smooth. Add additional milk if needed until the marzipan filling is nearly as soft as pudding.*
- 6. Whip cream with 2 tablespoons sugar to stiff peaks. Fill each shell with a spoonful of marzipan filling. Pipe whipped cream on top of the filling to 1/2 inch over the top of the bun. Replace the tops onto the buns, and dust with confectioner's sugar before serving.*