

Some Assembly Required

Ikea Meatballs for the Do-it-Yourselfer

BETWEEN SOUL-SATISFYING SPOONFULS OF *RIBOLLITA* AT A sophisticated Florentine *trattoria*, I confessed to the charming Swedish couple we'd been seated with that I was a fan of Ikea's meatballs. "But, of course," beamed the husband, head of a major Swedish muffler company. "At least once a month, I make an excuse to go to the store near my Stockholm office just so I can have the meatballs for lunch."

I felt like a foodie flasher publicly disclosing this plebeian joy. I don't normally even like meatballs. As I child, all I'd known were huge, dull things you had to cut with a knife and fork while balancing them on a mountain of spaghetti. But Ikea's are Swedish modern meatballs: small, light, understated. Napped with a comfortingly institutional "cream" sauce (it's brown, but it's not called gravy), they're served on a white plate with steamed red potatoes and a dollop of lingonberry sauce, the Swedish answer to cranberries.

Because almost anything I buy at Ikea will need some assembly when I get it home, a foraging meal makes special sense before I head for the checkout line. I savor my meatballs amid the nonthreatening birch veneer of the store's cafeteria while I flip

IKEA MEATBALLS

(Serves 4 to 6)

1 pound meat (3/4 pound lean ground beef, 1/4 pound lean ground pork)	1 egg yolk
1 small onion, grated (red is best)	1/2 cup unsweetened, fresh bread cubes soaked in 1/2 cup hot water
1 teaspoon salt	butter for frying
1 to 1 1/2 teaspoons ground allspice	

Combine meat, onion, salt, allspice, egg yolk and soaked bread. Mix thoroughly until smooth. Shape meatballs golf-ball size. This is easier if you dip your hands in cold water or use two spoons.

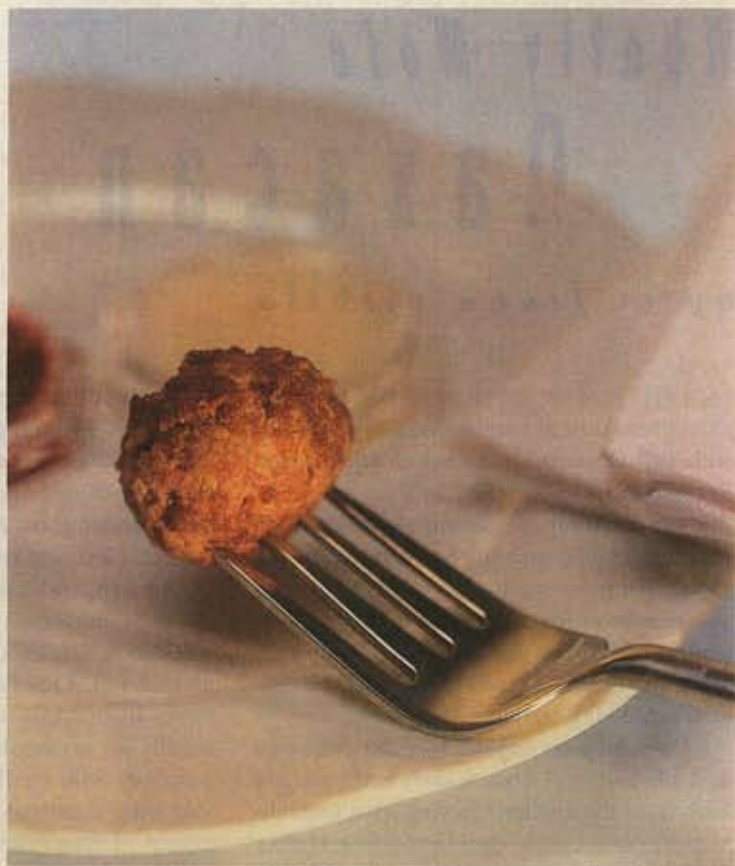
Fry meatballs, 8 to 10 at a time, in melted butter over moderate heat. Occasionally shake skillet so that meatballs will retain form and brown evenly, 5 to 7 minutes.

Serve with cream sauce, steamed potatoes and lingonberry preserves.

CREAM SAUCE

Adapted from the recipe for *köttbullar med sås* in "The Best of Swedish Cooking," available at Ikea.

Deglaze frying pan in which meatballs were cooked with 1 cup stock. Simmer for 8 minutes over low heat. Strain gravy and add enough water or stock to make 1 1/4 cup. Return to clean saucepan. Mix 1 1/2 tablespoons of flour with 1/4 cup cold water and beat into boiling gravy. Simmer for 3 to 5 minutes, until thickened slightly. Add 1/4 to 1/2 cup cream. Season with salt and pepper.



through the catalog, guessing at the etymology of the Hobbit-like names of the products: Orslev, Smedvik, Olav and Kronvik.

During my last trip to the store, I discovered the food shop's freezer section, where Ikea sells bags of meatballs and packages of cream sauce. My book group was coming for dinner the next night. Dare I expose myself again? It was one thing to confess your passions to a stranger you would never see a second time (though we did encourage them, I really doubt Mr. and Mrs. Muffler will be looking us up when they come to Los Angeles) but another to announce it to a group of people you meet with regularly. It could be the culinary equivalent of liking "The Bridges of Madison County" (I admit, it did have its moments).

"Oh, really?" one circumspect group member said, his voice flavored with doubt, when I first announced the evening's entree. He later apologized, dabbing sauce from his lips. His problem actually had to do with difficulty in parking at the store, he said as he took his plate back for seconds.

A diehard do-it-yourselfer, I had to track down the meatball recipe from Ikea North America Services, based in Plymouth Meeting, Pa. The master recipe—capable of feeding the world—is winnowed here to four to six servings. The homemade meatballs are very tasty but require considerably more tools and assembly time than the frozen kind, leaving one to treasure the frankly expedient pleasures of a prefabricated world.

—NANCY SPILLER

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