

## THE FRENCH OMELET “FINE-HERBES OMELETTE”

Omelets may seem easy enough to make — after all, it takes just a few ingredients to make them. But most people don't actually know the two main types of omelets (country and French) and their differences. A country omelet is what most restaurants in the United States serve. It has a large curd, a browned outer crust, and fillings. While there are a lot of variants on these some of the most popular are the Denver and the Greek omelet.



The French omelet, on the other hand, is a bit more delicate and requires a bit more knack to make. Historically it's been on the final exams of countless culinary students for just this reason. How to conquer it is detailed below. This recipe is drawn from instructions by Antonia Lofaso and Alton Brown on FoodNetwork.com, several cookbook sources, experience in culinary school and a few hundred broken eggs. But first, a bit of history as adapted from Wikipedia...

In cuisine, an omelet or omelette is a dish made from beaten eggs quickly cooked with butter or oil in a frying pan. It is quite common for the omelet to be folded around a filling such as cheese, chives, vegetables, meat (often ham), or some combination of the above. To obtain a fluffy texture, whole eggs or sometimes only egg whites are beaten with a small amount of milk or cream, or even water, the idea being to have "bubbles" of water vapor trapped within the rapidly cooked egg. Some home cooks add baking powder to produce a fluffier omelet; however, this ingredient is sometimes viewed unfavorably by traditionalists.

The fluffy omelet is a refined version of an ancient food. The French word omelette came into use during the mid-16th century, but the versions *alumelle* and *alumete* were used by 1393. There were other historical references to the omelet throughout the next centuries, but the modern omelet appears in modern French cuisine in the 1780's.

In Bessieres, Haute-Garonne, France they have an annual Easter omelet fest where they make a giant omelet in a giant pan in the middle of the town. Legend has it that when Napoleon and his armies were traveling through the south of France they rested one night near the town of Bessieres. A local innkeeper prepared an omelet for Napoleon. He loved this culinary delight so much he ordered all the towns people to gather all the eggs in the village and prepare a huge omelet for his troops the next day.

The classic French omelet is smoothly and briskly cooked in an extremely hot pan specially made for the purpose. The technique relies on clarified butter (to ensure a high smoke point) in relatively great ratio to the eggs (prevents sticking and cooks the eggs more quickly). Good with just salt and pepper, it is often flavored with tomato and finely chopped herbs (often “fines herbes” which are tarragon, chervil, parsley and chives) or chopped onions. They can be rolled out in a trifold design or just simply slid out of the pan directly into a plate and, when made correctly, have little to no color to them and have a soft consistency on the inside. In France, omelets are often made "with cheese" (“omelette au fromage” in French). When made with a mix of fresh herbs, it’s called “fine-herbes omelette”.

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### Ingredients

Three large eggs

1 ½ Tbsp unsalted butter

Fine salt

White pepper

2 Tbsp finely chopped herbs (one Tbsp parsley, one Tbsp mix of chervil, scallions and tarragon)

Optional: cream, scallions for garnish, fillings of choice such as cheese

### Directions

1. It’s best to start with room-temperature eggs so it doesn’t take them as long to warm up. The omelet will cook faster and be more tender. If the eggs are not at room temperature soak the eggs for 5 minutes in hot (not scalding) tap water.
2. Heat an 8 to 10-inch non-stick sauté pan over medium heat for 2 to 3 minutes. (Heat your pan empty for a few minutes before adding the butter: Even a nonstick surface is pocked with microscopic pores that eggs can fill and grab hold of. Heat expands the metal, squeezing these openings shut.) Add 1 teaspoon room-temperature unsalted butter. Once melted, tilt the pan to spread the butter around the pan. You know the pan is hot enough and the butter is ready when it stops bubbling. Do not let the butter brown. That is a sign that all the water in the butter has evaporated off and is ready. (Aside from closely monitoring your pan, there are two ways to help avoid browning butter. The first is to add about a teaspoon of vegetable oil to the pan – this lowers smoke point. The second, the classic way, is to use clarified butter – clarified butter has had the milk solids removed, which are the part of the butter that browns.)
3. Crack the eggs into a bowl. (Crack the eggs once sharply on a flat surface such as the counter top. Cracking them on the side of the bowl will introduce bits of shell and



possibly bacteria into the egg.) Beat the eggs with a fork until no separated egg white shows but not quite as completely as you would for scrambled eggs. (Use a fork instead of a whisk for omelets to avoid working air into the eggs: air bubbles are insulators and can slow down cooking.)

4. Water, milk, cream or nothing? This is an area of debate. Some chefs feel that adding a liquid like water, milk or cream helps create steam when the eggs hit the pan which adds to the fluff. Others feel that it waters down the egg. The classic French omelet has no added liquid. Cream added here adds to the flavor profile and is often favored.
5. Fresh herbs anyone? Often, French omelets are not filled with anything like a country omelet, but instead include finely chopped parsley, tarragon, chervil and scallions mixed into the eggs at this point.
6. Season the eggs with a pinch of white pepper and a pinch of salt. Stir the eggs just a bit. (Salt will actually start the cooking process of the eggs and thus change their color, so it's best to wait until just before cooking to add salt. White pepper is preferred over black as it has a more complex, soft flavor and does not discolor the eggs with black specks.) Remember to use less salt if using cheese, which contains a lot of salt already.

7. Pour the eggs into the center of the pan. If the pan has been properly heated there should be a light sizzling sound – that's the moisture in the eggs evaporating and fluffing the eggs.



8. Stir vigorously running a spatula around the eggs immediately after they hit the pan, about 5 to 10 seconds. (Actually, it's not so much a matter of stirring with the spatula as holding the spatula relatively still and moving the pan around to stir the eggs. It's kind of like moving the pan during sautéing, but with no vertical movement and more lateral movement. Using a spatula instead of a fork makes it easier to work the edges of the pan.)



9. Let them cook: As soon as curds begin to form (that's the stuff that looks like scrambled eggs), lift the pan and tilt it around until the excess liquid pours off the top of the curds and into the pan. Move the spatula around the edge of the egg mixture to help shape it into a round and loosen the edge. Stop stirring and tilt the pan so the majority of the egg gathers at the side away from the handle – this will make it easier to fold and transfer to the plate. (You will fold the thin edge opposite this over onto the thicker part in a few



seconds.) Hold it here unbothered for 20 seconds to a minute so it can develop a proper solid form on the outside. (If adding a filling such as shredded cheese, add it at this point, about a tablespoon. Parmesan and Asiago are good choices.) Note that the eggs will not be completely cooked through as with scrambled eggs – there should be a layer or pockets of partially cooked, runny egg on the top.

Note: Another excellent filling is mushrooms sautéed in white wine and garlic. Escoffier devoted about a dozen pages to omelets in his classic book – they are well worth exploring.

10. Finish the omelet. Time for the “jiggle” step: Simply shake the pan gently to make sure the omelet is free of the pan. (You can also gently tap the far edge of the pan on the stove to move the omelet downwards into the far lip of the pan to begin the lower fold.) Use the spatula to lift up the thin edge (about one third of the omelet) near the handle and fold it over. (Each folded third will not be the same thickness.)
11. Change your grip on the pan handle from an overhand to an underhand and move to the plate, which you might want to coat with just a brief brushing of butter to make sure things don't bind up in transit. Slide the one-third farthest from you onto a warmed plate and then ease the fold over. Imagine that you're making a tri-fold wallet out of eggs because that's exactly what you're doing. And then just ease the pan over.
12. When it comes to the consistency the outside should be formed and the inside should be soft and gooey. Typically, French omelets do not have any browning on the outside, but a little bit is okay.
13. If needed, use a fork or spatula to shape the omelet into a point at each end.
14. Gently rub a pat of butter atop the folded omelet to glaze.
15. Garnish with whole or chopped scallions.
16. For wine pairing choose creamy, fruit-forward Chardonnay-based Champagne, for example NV Pierre Gimmonnet ler Cru Blanc de Blancs.

