

Let Your Irish Eyes Shine

Whether you have a true Irish heritage or one that is more based on imagination, everyone has an opportunity to get into the act this week as St. Patrick's Day hits with a flurry of green. There's no better opportunity for an "end of winter" celebration with friends and letting the rich traditions of Ireland form the basis of great fun and festivity.

St. Patrick is the patron saint of Ireland and he was credited with a host of miracles while a bishop including driving the snakes from Ireland. (I don't know about you but I don't like snakes and that one would be a "biggy" on my personal scale of miracles.) St. Patrick's sainthood was actually a result of his conversion of the Irish celtic pagans to Christianity. His use of the Irish shamrock during his preaching was as a symbol of the holy trinity.

The first actual celebration of St. Patrick's Day in America was in Boston, Massachusetts in 1737 and it has come quite a distance since then with decidedly American touches such as green beer, numerous parades and even a river dyed green in Chicago every year as part of the celebration. We've planned a Saturday dinner party this year with friends and I've selected dishes that fit the occasion while limiting the use of green food coloring severely. I hope you'll do something special this year and take this opportunity to show appreciation of great friends and family.

Ireland does in fact have something of a reputation for rather bland foods but there are some real treasures if you look. First and foremost you must consider the noble potato and our potato dish this year is a traditional one called colcannon. Here's the scoop:

Irish Colcannon

(serves 6 to 8)



- 6 cups finely shredded cabbage
- 1 large sweet onion, chopped
- ½ cup chicken stock
- 6 medium potatoes, boiled skin on and then peeled
- ½ cup half & half

4 tablespoons softened butter (room temperature)
6 slices bacon, fried crispy and crumbled
4 green onions, finely chopped for garnish
sea salt and fresh ground black pepper, to taste

Place your cabbage, onion and chicken stock in a covered heavy bottomed soup pot and heat to boiling. Cook just until the cabbage and onion are tender, not mushy. In the mean time mash your boiled potatoes adding to them the softened butter and half and half until fluffy. Fold the potatoes into the cooked cabbage and onions until well mixed and garnish with crumbled bacon. Top with chopped green onions and salt and pepper to taste. When serving form a small crater in the colcannon and add another teaspoon of butter allowing it to melt into the dish.

For our main dish during this feast we will be serving a roasted bone-in prime rib with fresh horseradish, which is not entirely traditional to St. Patty's Day but "what the hey," we're all not entirely Irish either. If you'd like to keep completely traditional a nice roasted corned beef brisket or leg of lamb is just the ticket.

Our first course for this meal is going to be a personal favorite of mine, which is actually drawn from some of the new age Irish recipes I've collected. I've often served it as a meal unto itself but it's just too good not to include in this Saturday's event.

Smoked Salmon Chowder

(serves 4 to 6)

3 tablespoons unsalted butter
1 onion, peeled and chopped
1 clove garlic, peeled and minced
1 medium red potato, peeled, thinly sliced and diced (1/2 inch)
4 ounces white mushrooms, cleaned and chopped
2 tablespoons minced fresh flat-leaf parsley
4 ounces smoked salmon, chopped
Ground white pepper, to taste
¼ cup all-purpose flour
2 ¼ cups fish stock or bottled clam juice
¾ cup half and half
Crème fraiche for garnish, optional
4 dill sprigs for garnish

In a medium saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat. Add onions, garlic, potato, mushrooms and parsley. Cook for 3 to 4 minutes or until all vegetables are tender, potatoes will just be beginning to soften. Add the salmon and white pepper and sauté for two minutes, or until the salmon is heated through. Remove the pan from the heat and stir in the flour. Gradually stir in the fish stock or clam juice.

Return pan to medium heat and slowly bring to a boil. Reduce heat to a gentle simmer and cook for 5 to 7 minutes, until thickened. Stir in half and half and continue gentle simmer until well heated. If you would like to further thicken a touch more, use a couple tablespoons of instant mashed potatoes and cook until you reach the desired consistency.

To serve ladle the chowder into bowls, dollup with crème fraiche and top with a dill sprig.

The traditional beverages that are part of a St. Patrick's Day celebration in Dublin would be Irish whiskey and a pint of Guinness or perhaps a Porter. These beers are rich, complex and certainly not for the faint of heart. I appreciate tradition but I also appreciate a great wine with my meal so my recommendations for this week will stay more in my area of expertise.

One of the greatest wines to combine with serious dining is a well-made Burgundy or from our domestic cellar, a great hand-crafted Pinot Noir. This past year provided many opportunities to taste top quality wines in this style but the standout for the year was the **2003 Chehalem 3 Vineyards Pinot Noir** from Oregon's Willamette Valley. This is a fully ripe Pinot with fresh fruit styling that is engaging and well beyond what most people have ever experienced. The wine has rich depth and complexity on a platform that is lush, rounded and satiny soft on the palate. Look for ripe cassis and blackberries along with an earthy character normally only experienced in great red Burgundies.

As you hoist your glass this weekend be sure to observe the Irish tradition of the toast and if you don't already have one picked out, here's one I might suggest:

"May the Irish hills caress you; may her lakes and rivers bless you. May the luck of the Irish enfold you; may the blessings of St. Patrick behold you." Have a wonderful St. Patty's Day and let us know if you have any questions at 888-288-0668 or visit us on the web at www.winedog.com. Cheers.