

Tempting Taters



Often ignored for the tremendous contribution it makes to our meals, the potato in one form or another offers us comfort and stability at a time of culinary confusion. Just look at your latest copies of whatever food magazines you read. Those east or west coast “food experts” would have you eating yucca, poi, plantains or any number of other starch side dishes.

Tell them “enough is enough!” When you go out and order a magnificent steak grilled to perfection what are you going to have as a side? “I believe I’ll have a tempting dollop of that intriguing looking couscous.” Yeah, right! Get real. You’re going to go for that $\frac{3}{4}$ pound monster baked potato with real butter, sour cream, bacon bits and fresh chives.” Have I made my point?

We are a nation that loves the spud. You would think George Washington Carver had been involved in discovering ways to prepare potatoes when you consider the formidable list of styles. We have baked, mashed, hash browns, tots, regular fries, pancakes, curly fries, dumplings, steak fries, chips, boiled, and on and on. The biggest and most powerful fast food giants don’t talk a great deal about it, but they put huge emphasis on having the best fries because they know that great fries are critical when attracting the customer.

Well we are quickly heading into the feasting season and potatoes will undoubtedly be a part of your plans so here are some ideas to chew over. We’ve got three styles of preparation this week and one is sure to work for you.

Hash Brown Casserole

(Serves 6)

You’ll need:

2 pound bag of frozen hash browns

1 cup melted butter

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon fresh ground pepper

1 teaspoon sea salt
¾ cup chopped white onions
1 can condensed cream of chicken soup
1 cup sour cream
2 cups shredded cheddar cheese
2 cups plain corn flakes

Preheat oven to 350°F. In a large mixing bowl combine all ingredients except for ½ cup melted butter and corn flakes. I've found the best way to really mix all of this is with your hands. Transfer your mix to a large casserole; top it with 2 cups of corn flakes and drizzle ½ cup of melted butter into the corn flakes. Bake for 1 hour uncovered and be sure to place your casserole in the middle of the oven for even heating. Cover loosely with foil when done and allow it to cool 10 minutes before serving.

Another delicious potato dish for family and friends is a simple dish prepared from new red potatoes that has always been a hit at our table.

New Potatoes With Parsley

(Serves 6 to 8)

3 pounds of firm, unblemished new red potatoes (Wash and scrub them with a stiff bristle brush until they are free of dirt. Figure this to be 24 to 30 potatoes depending on their size.)

1 pound unsalted butter
2 cups fresh chopped parsley (use flat leaf or curly leaf depending on your taste)
sea salt to taste

Place your cleaned potatoes in a heavy bottomed pot with enough water to almost cover the potatoes. Bring them to a boil, reduce heat to medium low and cover. Boil potatoes until just tender, not overly soft when punctured by a fork, roughly 30 to 45 minutes.

Just before serving, drain off the water and add the butter. Once butter is completely melted gently stir potatoes and break them up into medium sized chunks. Add your fresh, chopped parsley and continue to stir potatoes until it is evenly distributed. Serve immediately.

Finally, everyone needs a great mashed potato recipe and this one is very good. It has the added benefit of being low in fat but, as you know, that rarely plays a part in what I cook. I believe you should prepare the food to be delicious but watch your portion size to control factors like calories and fats.

Buttermilk Mashed Potatoes

(6 to 8 servings)

Place directly on the oven rack:

2 1/2 pounds russet (Idaho) potatoes, all about the same size, scrubbed and pricked with a fork

Bake at 400°F for approximately 45 to 60 minutes, until a thin skewer meets little resistance when ran through the potato. Let cool slightly, then peel them. Place the potatoes in a pan and mash with a potato masher. If you enjoy lump free, very smooth potatoes, use a ricer and press the potatoes a chunk at a time through the basket.

Add to the mashed potatoes:

1 1/3 cups buttermilk (adjust according to your own dry/moist preference)

2 tablespoons olive oil (optional)

1 teaspoon sea salt (to taste)

Ground black pepper to taste

Freshly grated or ground nutmeg to taste (optional)

Gently mix the potatoes with a spoon, taking care not to whip or beat hard or they will be come gummy. (A good reason to avoid using hand mixers when making mashed potatoes.) Reheat if necessary and serve.

If you are still working on wine ideas for your Thanksgiving or Christmas celebrations and you love good Chardonnay, we've got a couple of them to suggest this week for your wine cellar. The first is produced by France's Louis Latour out of the Burgundy region and is called the **Latour Grande Ardeche Chardonnay** from the 2004 vintage. This wine has a delicate style but is filled to the brim with lush fruit character, buttery texture, vanilla and butterscotch. It is a perfect example of what a few French producers do better than almost any producers in the world. That is, provide rich complex flavors in a simple, straightforward manner.

California's **2003 Joliesse Reserve Chardonnay** is all American and one of our "Best Buy" selections for this season. Once again, we have a prime example that great wine can be found at prices anyone can accept. Joliesse comes from the French words for grace and loveliness, two qualities we agree are found in this delightful white wine. You will experience fresh tangy lemon, crisp green apples and subtle tones of oak and vanilla.

We are always happy to help you with your wine or food questions at (888) 288-0668 or visit us on the web at www.winedog.com. Cheers!