

Caesar Salad

This is a riff on the original Caesar Salad, created in Acapulco by a cook or kitchen worker when some Hollywood types in 1950's arrived after the restaurants were closed. The creator used what was at hand to feed them.

Our son John and I experienced something similar when we were building our house in Abaco. It was late. We were starving. Rex and Judy Allbury only had Conch Salad and white bread. John still loves Conch Salad.

Ingredients

- Wooden bowl
- Romaine lettuce
- Garlic clove
- One tin anchovies
- Olive Oil
- Safflower Oil
- Salt
- Pepper
- Worcester Sauce
- Dijon mustard
- Fresh lemon
- Parmesan or Parmesan-Romano cheese
- Croutons

Procedure

Use a wooden bowl, the ingredients have to stick.

Take a large clove of garlic, trim the husk and ends and rub it around the bowl.

Crush (using a garlic press if you have one) the garlic and place it in the bowl.

Empty a tin of flat anchovies with oil into the bowl and then mince the anchovies.

Add some olive oil. Add a quantity of safflower oil equal to 1/4 to 1/3 of the amount of Olive Oil to the bowl. Safflower oil helps lighten the olive oil and does not let the olive oil dominate the flavor.

Add salt and pepper to taste. Remember that the anchovies will be salty so taste first.

Add three of four shakes of Worcester Sauce and a heaping tablespoon of French Dijon mustard.

Add the juice of one half to a whole lemon.

Taste. The dressing should be balanced--not too oily or too acidic. Add fresh lemon juice or oil as needed to balance the dressing.

Using the large holes of a box grater, grate Parmesan Cheese or Romano/Parmesan Cheese.

Wash and spin or towel dry Romaine lettuce. Allow it to chill if possible.

Tear the Romaine, not cut it, and add it to the dressing in the bowl along with the grated cheese and croutons. Use large croutons if possible.

Toss and serve. Don't allow it to sit too long before serving as the dressing is strong.

Hachis Parmentier

Makes 4 generous servings

Hachis Parmentier is a well-seasoned meat-and-mashed-potato pie (like a Shepherd's Pie) that is customarily made with leftovers from a boiled beef dinner, like pot-au-feu. If you have leftover beef

and broth from anything you've made, go ahead and use it. Or, if you'd like to shortcut the process, make Quick hachis Parmentier (see instructions below). But if you start from scratch and make your own bouillon, and if you add tasty sausage (not completely traditional), you'll have the kind of hachis Parmentier that would delight even Daniel Boulud, a chef from Lyon who lives in New York City.

You can use chuck, as you would for a stew. However, one day my stateside butcher suggested I use cube steak, a cut I'd never cooked with. Cube steak is an inexpensive, thin, tenderized cut that cooks quickly and works perfectly here. If you use it, just cut it into 2-inch pieces before boiling it. If you use another type of beef, you should cut it into smaller pieces, and you might want to cook it for another 30 minutes.

For the beef and bouillon

- 1 pound cube steak or boneless beef chuck (see above), cut into small pieces
- 1 small onion, sliced
- 1 small carrot, trimmed, peeled and cut into 1-inch-long pieces
- 1 small celery stalk, trimmed and cut into 1-inch-long pieces
- 2 garlic cloves, smashed and peeled
- 2 parsley sprigs
- 1 bay leaf
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/4 teaspoon black peppercorns
- 6 cups water
- 1/2 beef bouillon cube (optional)

For the filling

- 1-1/2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 pound sausage, sweet or spicy, removed from casings if necessary
- 1 teaspoon tomato paste
- Salt and freshly ground pepper

For the topping

- 2 pounds Idaho (russet) potatoes, peeled and quartered
- 1/2 cup whole milk
- 1/4 cup heavy cream
- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature, plus 1 tablespoon butter, cut into bits
- Salt and freshly ground pepper
- 1/2 cup grated Gruyere, Comte, or Emmental
- 2 tablespoons freshly grated Parmesan (optional)

Prepare the beef

Put all the ingredients except the bouillon cube in a Dutch oven or soup pot and bring to a boil, skimming off the foam and solids that bubble to the surface. Lower the heat and simmer gently for 1 1/2 hours. The broth will have a mild flavor, and that's fine for this dish, but if you want to pump it up, you can stir in 1/2 bouillon cube. Taste the broth at the midway point and decide.

Drain the meat, reserving the broth. Transfer the meat to a cutting board and discard the vegetables, or if they've still got some flavor to spare, hold on to them for the filling. Traditionally hachis Parmentier is vegetable-less, but that shouldn't stop you from salvaging and using the vegetables. Strain the broth. (The beef and bouillon can be made up to one day ahead, covered and refrigerated.)

Using a chef's knife, chop the beef into tiny pieces. You could do this in a food processor, but the texture of your hachis Parmentier will be more interesting if you chop it by hand, an easy and quick job.

Prepare the filling

Butter a 2-quart oven-going casserole. A Pyrex deep-dish pie plate is just the right size for this. Put a large skillet over medium heat and pour in the olive oil. When it's hot, add the sausage and cook, breaking up the clumps of meat, until the sausage is just pink. Add the chopped beef and tomato paste and stir to mix everything well. Stir in 1 cup of the bouillon and bring to a boil. You want to have just enough bouillon in the pan to moisten the filling and to bubble up gently wherever there's a little room. If you think you need more (a smidgen more is better than too little), add it now. Season with salt and pepper, especially pepper. If you've kept any of the vegetables from the bouillon, cut them into small cubes and stir them into the filling before you put the filling in the casserole. Scrape the filling into the casserole and cover it lightly; set aside while you prepare the potatoes. (You can make the dish to this point up to a few hours ahead; cover the casserole with foil and refrigerate.)

Prepare the topping

Have ready a potato ricer or food mill (first choices), a masher, or a fork. Put the potatoes in a large pot of generously salted cold water and bring to a boil. Cook until the potatoes are tender enough to be pierced easily with the tip of a knife, about 20 minutes; drain them well.

Meanwhile, center a rack in the oven and preheat the oven to 400 degrees F. Line a baking sheet with foil or a silicone baking mat (you'll use it as a drip catcher). Warm the milk and cream. Run the potatoes through the ricer or food mill into a bowl, or mash them well. Using a wooden spoon or a sturdy spatula, stir in the milk and cream, then blend in the 3 tablespoons butter. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Spoon the potatoes over the filling, spreading them evenly and making sure they reach to the edges of the casserole. Sprinkle the grated Gruyere, Comte or Emmental over the top of the pie, dust with the Parmesan (if using), and scatter over the bits of butter. Place the dish on the lined baking sheet.

Bake for 30 minutes, or until the filling is bubbling steadily and the potatoes have developed a golden-brown crust (the best part). Serve.

Serving

Bring the hachis Parmentier to the table and spoon out portions there. The dish needs nothing more than a green salad to make it a full and very satisfying meal.

Storing

It's easy to make this dish in stages: the beef and bouillon can be made up to a day ahead and kept covered in the refrigerator, and the filling can be prepared a few hours ahead and kept covered in the fridge. You can even assemble the entire pie ahead and keep it chilled for a few hours before baking it (directly from the refrigerator if your casserole can stand the temperature change). Of course, you'll have to bake it a little longer than you would if the dish is room temperature. If you've got leftovers, you can reheat them in a 350-degree-F oven.

Quick Hachis Parmentier

You can make a very good hachis Parmentier using ground beef and store-bought beef broth. Use a pound of ground beef instead of the steak, and when you add it to the sausage in the skillet, think

about adding some finely chopped fresh parsley and maybe a little minced fresh thyme. You can also saute 1 or 2 minced garlic cloves, split and the germ removed, in the olive oil before the sausage goes into the skillet. (The herbs and garlic help mimic the aromatics in the bouillon.) Moisten the filling with the broth, and you're good to go.

Enjoy.

Good Basic Chili Courtesy of Penzey's Spices, Richmond, VA

Great with a sandwich on a cold day or as a meal with shredded Cheddar cheese or a dollop of sour cream on top, with fresh buttered bread on the side. Serves six to eight. Leftovers freeze well. Start with the full amount of regular or medium chili powder and add extra hot pepper to taste for the full range of chili flavor. If you use less than the full 3 TB. the recipe calls for, the result will be more like tomato soup with beef.

2 lbs. ground beef 3 TB. vegetable oil
1 medium onion, chopped 1 red bell pepper, chopped
3 cloves garlic, minced or 1/2 tsp. GARLIC GRANULES
1/2 tsp. fresh ground BLACK PEPPER 1 tsp. GROUND CUMIN
1/2 tsp. ground CHIPOTLE PEPPER 1/2 - 1 1/2 tsp. CRUSHED RED PEPPERS
3 TB. CHILI POWDER 3 Cups water
1 26 oz. can tomato puree 2 16 oz. cans no salt added chopped tomatoes
2 16 oz. cans kidney beans, drained 1-2 tsp. salt

Brown beef in two batches in a thick-bottomed soup kettle. Drain off fat and set browned beef aside. Heat 3 TB. oil in kettle over medium high heat, adding onions when hot. Sauté for 4-5 minutes, stirring often. Add red bell pepper and GARLIC, continuing to cook 2-3 more minutes. Add BLACK PEPPER, GROUND CUMIN, CHIPOTLE and HOT RED PEPPERS to taste plus CHILI POWDER, while continually stirring until spices begin to stick to bottom of kettle and brown (about 30-45 seconds). Quickly add 3 Cups of water. Add tomato puree, chopped tomatoes and the juice they were packed in. Add kidney beans and salt. Add the beef but try not to include any fat that may have accumulated. Stir. When chili begins to boil, reduce heat to low and cover. Ideally chili should be simmered 3 hours to let all the flavors blend together. Stir about every 15 minutes, while checking to make sure heat is not too high, causing chili to stick to the bottom of the kettle. If you don't have 3 hours, use less CHIPOTLE and CRUSHED RED PEPPERS or else they will overpower the other flavors.