

EASY STUFFED POTATOES

If you've had a bad day and need a little comfort food, it's hard to go wrong with these stuffed potatoes. You can fool yourself into thinking how all the wonderful nutrients from the potatoes are helping your heart and blood pressure, while ignoring all the evils from the bacon, sour cream and cheese. Given the opportunity, you can rationalize anything.

INGREDIENTS

4 Russet or Idaho potatoes

4 slices bacon

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup sour cream, plus $\frac{1}{2}$ cup for serving

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup yogurt

2 tablespoons of butter

salt and pepper to taste

1 cup shredded gruyere (or cheese of your choice)

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup parmesan cheese

chives, chopped for garnish

PREPARATION

Pre-heat oven to 350 degrees.

Rinse the potatoes to remove any dirt, then dry. Poke holes around potatoes with a fork. Place on baking sheet and bake for one-hour.

Meanwhile, in a skillet render the bacon. Remove when crisp and drain on paper towels. When cool, crumble and set aside.

Remove potatoes from oven and let cool for ten minutes. Slice

potatoes in half lengthwise. Carefully remove the flesh of the potato without damaging the skins. Place skins back on baking sheet.

In a large bowl, combine the potato flesh, $\frac{3}{4}$ of the bacon, $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sour cream, yogurt, butter, and gruyere cheese. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Gently mash to combine.

Spoon the mixture evenly into the potato skins.

Place back in the oven for fifteen minutes.

Using the remaining sour cream, place a dollop on each potato. Garnish with the remainder of bacon, parmesan cheese, and chives.

ASIAN DUCK SOUP

About once a year, my friends and I head down to Chinatown for a Peking Duck feast. There's a great restaurant – Hwa Yuan Szechuan on East Broadway – that serves this classic dish tableside. After the waiter slices every last possible bit of meat off of the carcass, I ask him to wrap up the bones and leftovers for this amazing broth. I'm always a bit embarrassed to ask, but I forget about all of that once I sit down to eat this yummy soup.

INGREDIENTS (serves 8)

FOR BROTH

2 small cinnamon sticks

5 star anise

6 cloves

10 whole coriander seeds
10 whole peppercorns
1 duck carcass, preferably with neck
2 turkey necks
4 quarts tap water
1 onion, coarsely chopped
1 large carrot, coarsely chopped
2 ribs celery, coarsely chopped
3 garlic cloves smashed with a knife
1 inch knob of ginger, smashed with a knife
1 tablespoon soy sauce
1 tablespoon mirin
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons salt
1 teaspoon fresh ground pepper
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon red pepper chili flakes

FOUR SOUP

1 tablespoon canola oil
1 onion, sliced
4 baby bok choy, rough chop
6 dried Chinese mushrooms, rehydrated and sliced
2 cups of cooked duck meat, cubed (chicken or turkey can be substituted)
1 tablespoon soy sauce

1 tablespoon mirin

10 cups of duck broth

1 pound of rice vermicelli or other rice noodles

Bean sprouts, for garnish

Scallions, sliced for garnish

Fried onions, sliced for garnish



PREPARATION

FOR BROTH

Combine cinnamon stick, star anise, cloves, coriander seed and peppercorns into a tied sachet. Set aside.

Place duck carcass and turkey necks into a large stock pot or dutch oven. Add in water, cover, and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and crack lid to allow evaporation. Every two hours, replenish water that has evaporated, bring back to boil, then down to simmer. The total simmer time should be 8 hours.

At the end of 8 hours, add the spice sachet, onion, carrot, celery, garlic, ginger, soy sauce, mirin, salt, pepper and chili flakes. Bring back to boil, then down to simmer for a final 90 minutes.

Turn off heat, remove spice sachet, and allow to cool on stove. Refrigerate over night.

In the morning, the liquid may have congealed due to the bone collagen. Just reheat enough to liquefy again, about five minutes. Using another large pot, pour liquid through a chinois or sieve. Discard vegetables and other solids. Refrigerate until you're ready to make soup, or freeze for up to two months.

FOR SOUP

Place dried mushrooms into a bowl of warm water and rehydrate for 25 minutes. Drain water, slice mushrooms, and set aside.

In a separate large pot, heat canola oil over medium-high heat. Add in onion and sauté until it becomes translucent and begins to caramelize, about 6-8 minutes.

Add in duck meat, bok choy, sliced mushrooms and sauté for one minute. Add in soy sauce and mirin. Add in duck broth and bring to a boil, then lower to a simmer for 30 minutes.

In a separate pot, cook noodles as per package suggestion. (I keep noodles separate from broth until serving.)

Divide noodles into soup bowls, cover with soup. Garnish with scallions, fried onions, and bean sprouts.

STUFFED MUSHROOMS

Stuffed mushrooms are an old classic that never goes out of style. Why have they stood the test of time? Could it be the bacon or garlic or Parmesan that gets stuffed inside each cap? Personally, they had me at bacon.

I like serving these on a platter during a martini-fueled cocktail hour or placing three on a plate as a first course in a dinner party. But there's nothing stopping you from popping them into your mouth right off the baking tray. I promise, I won't tell.

INGREDIENTS

2 slices bacon

1 shallot, diced

3 cloves garlic, minced

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup panko

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup Parmesan, finely grated

Salt & Pepper to taste

Olive Oil

1 dozen cremini mushrooms

2 tablespoons chopped chives

Truffle oil or truffle salt for garnish (optional)

PREPARATION

Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

In a medium sized skillet, render the bacon until crispy. Remove bacon, then crumble when cool and set aside.

Sauté the shallot and garlic in the bacon drippings until translucent. With a slotted spoon, remove the shallot and garlic mixture and set aside.

In a medium sized bowl, combine the bacon, shallot and garlic mixture, panko, and cheese. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Drizzle with two tablespoons of olive oil and gently mix all to combine.

Clean mushrooms with a brush and remove the stems. Place the mushrooms on a baking sheet and stuff each one with a tablespoon of the mixture. Lightly drizzle olive oil on top. Bake until the tops are golden brown, about 15 minutes.

Remove from oven and allow to cool for a few minutes. Garnish with chives.

(For an extra burst of flavor, sprinkle on a few crystals of truffle salt or one drop of truffle oil on each mushroom just before serving.)

SALMON STEAK WITH GARDEN FRESH RELISH

Every summer we plant lots of cherry tomatoes on our deck. Of course, they all become ripe around the same time, so I'm always looking for new things to do with them. This simple

relish is great on top of almost any fish. I like serving it on top of salmon steaks because the acidity cuts the natural fat from the fish. Just watch out for bones! Salmon steaks can be very boney.

INGREDIENTS (serves 2)

2 Salmon Steaks

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup Japanese barbecue sauce (or Soy Sauce)

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup maple syrup

12 cherry tomatoes, quartered

2 basil leaves, chopped

1 sprig dill, chopped

4 chives, chopped

2 Tablespoons olive oil

salt and pepper

PREPARATION

Season salmon steaks with salt and pepper and place in Ziploc gallon bag. Combine Japanese barbecue sauce and maple syrup in a bowl. Pour into Ziploc bag and close bag. Gently massage salmon steaks making sure marinade covers the fish. Place in refrigerator for 4-6 hours.

Remove fish from refrigerator 30 minutes before cooking. Oil the grates and preheat grill to medium heat. (This can be done on the stovetop with a grill pan, too.) Place salmon steaks on the grill for 4-6 minutes, each side, depending upon how well done you like your salmon.

In a small bowl, combine the cherry tomatoes, basil leaves, dill, chives, and olive oil. Season to taste with salt and

pepper.

To serve, spoon the relish on top of the salmon steaks.

3-CHEESE GRILLED WHITE PIZZA

I know this is sacrilege, but I'm not a big fan of tomato sauce on my pizza. To be honest, it's not that I don't like it, it's that it doesn't like me. It gives me terrible heartburn. But I refuse to give up pizza, so I came up with this recipe for a white pizza, which is really just an excuse to add more cheese.

INGREDIENTS

1 package Pizza dough

4 strips bacon, cooked & chopped

6 shiitake mushrooms, sliced

6 cremini mushrooms, sliced

1 shallot, minced

3 cloves garlic, minced

1/2 pound taleggio cheese, grated

1/2 pound mozzarella, grated

1/2 pound parmesan cheese, grated

2 tablespoons olive oil

truffle oil

salt and pepper
red pepper flakes

2 Tablespoons parsley, chopped for garnish (Optional)

PREPARATION

Render bacon, cool and chop. Set aside. Using two tablespoons of bacon fat, sauté mushrooms, shallots and garlic. If there is not enough bacon fat, supplement with olive oil. Season with salt, pepper & red pepper flakes. Set aside. Grate cheeses separately and set aside. Stretch dough and set aside.

Heat grill to 400 degrees. Once hot, brush grates with olive oil. Stretch dough again and place on grill for approximately 2- 3 minutes until underside gets nice grill marks. Keep eye on it so it doesn't burn.

Flip dough onto pizza peel with the uncooked side down and cooked side up. Dress it quickly as follows: brush first with olive oil. Add mushroom mixture and bacon. Cover with taleggio and mozzarella cheeses. Sprinkle parmesan cheese on top.

Using tongs, pull pizza off peel and place back on grill. Close grill and bake for 2 – 3 minutes. Keep an eye on it. When cheese is fully melted, pull pizza off grill with tongs and place on pizza peel. Drizzle lightly with truffle oil. Garnish with parsley (optional). Cut with pizza cutter. Use the peel as a serving vessel.

ASIAN GRILLED CHICKEN OVER

GREENS

When I was living and working in Asia, I had a tiny little kitchen in my flat. No oven, just a three-burner cooktop, a microwave, and a half-refrigerator. But I managed to cook up some feasts with all of the exotic ingredients I would find at the markets. This was one of my favorite go-to dishes that had all my burners cooking at once.

INGREDIENTS

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup tamari
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup brown sugar
1 tablespoon lime juice
1 tablespoon lemon juice
2 tablespoons orange juice
1 tablespoon sweet chili sauce
1 teaspoon chile-garlic sauce
4 cloves garlic, minced
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of cumin
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon of five-spice
6 skinless, boneless chicken thighs

FOR GREENS

2 tablespoons olive oil
1 teaspoon sesame oil
2 cloves garlic minced
2 bunches Chinese spinach

1 red pepper, diced

$\frac{1}{4}$ head of purple cabbage, chopped

PREPARATION

Place tamari, brown sugar, lime juice, lemon juice, orange juice, sweet chili sauce, chile-garlic sauce, garlic, cumin, and five-spice into a bowl and whisk together until sugar and spices are dissolved. Transfer to a large ziplock bag.

Place the chicken pieces into the ziplock and marinate overnight.

Remove the chicken thighs from the fridge 45 minutes before you're ready to cook them.

Preheat your grill pan on medium-high heat and lightly oil the grates.

Remove chicken pieces from ziplock and place on the grill pan for 7-10 minutes per side, or until chicken registers 165° F at the thickest part when tested with an instant read thermometer.

Pour the excess marinade into a saucepan. Bring the sauce to a boil for ninety seconds, then lower the heat and simmer for three more minutes. Use the marinade to baste the chicken every five minutes.

Prepare the greens. In a skillet or wok, heat the olive oil until just before smoking. Add the sesame oil and garlic and stir-fry for 30 seconds. Add the greens, purple cabbage, and red pepper. Continue to stir-fry for about three minutes or until spinach is limp.

To plate: Place the stir-fried vegetables on the bottom of the plate, then place chicken thighs on top of the greens. Pour remaining marinade over chicken.

GRILLED PEACHES

I love peaches, but it's really hard to get perfectly ripe ones here in New York without spending a fortune. One way I've found to bring out their flavor is to grill them. The heat helps bring out the juiciness of even the saddest peach. Here's a recipe for a fun and easy summer dessert you can easily make on your grill.

INGREDIENTS

6 ripe peaches, halved and pitted

$\frac{1}{2}$ stick melted butter for brushing

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup pecans, toasted and chopped

$\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon sugar

$\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon kosher salt

Zest of $\frac{1}{2}$ lemon

Mint sprigs

Vanilla ice cream (optional)

PREPARATION

Preheat grill (or grill pan) to medium heat.

Combine the pecans, sugar, salt and lemon zest in a small bowl.

Brush the cut side of the peaches with the melted butter. Place peaches on grill cut-side down for about 2-3 minutes, or until char marks form. If peaches still very firm, clock them

at a 90-degree angle and continue to cook for one minute.

Remove the peaches from the grill, flipping them over to show char marks on top. Sprinkle the pecan mixture on top and garnish with mint sprig.

Optional – serve with vanilla ice cream.

SOMETIMES THE BEST MEALS ARE A SURPRISE

When I travel, my husband and I love to go off the beaten path to discover things many tourists might miss. We love the back roads and small towns where every day life just moves along in its normal flow. While in Hanoi, we wanted to get a sense of life outside of the city, so we made arrangements for an unusual culinary side-tour which included hand-made vermicelli production and a lunch at the mayor's house. (It was a very small village and the mayor was able to charge a hefty fee for the honor).

We weren't quite sure what to expect, but within an hour of leaving our hotel, we were somewhere out in the country in a small village called Cu Da. Compared to the chaos of Hanoi where you take your life in your hands just to cross the street, this small village was almost silent and everyone seemed to walk at half-speed.



Our first stop was a small hut by the side of the road that was making hand-made vermicelli sheets. It's an amazing process to watch. Arrowroot is ground and mixed with water to make a paste. Then super-thin long sheets—almost the consistency of those fruit strips you ate as a kid—are spread out onto large bamboo trays to dry. They are then cut into thin strips, dried again before packaging, and then shipped around the world. The people of this village have been doing this for generations and it has become the main income for the villagers.



We were then taken to the mayor's house for lunch. We were told the mayor would not be joining us, but the host insisted we first take a nap. This was not optional. Not wanting to seem rude, we tried to relax on the hard bed and pretended to sleep. Watching us from a crack in the doorway was the mayor's granddaughter, an adorable and curious seven-year old. Catching my eye, she giggled and ran away.



When nap time was over, we were presented with a multi-course feast. Fried tofu, beef with scallions and bok choy, sautéed greens, vegetable spring rolls, some tasty stew concoction and, of course, vermicelli noodles served in a light soy sauce topped with fried shallots. The home cooked dishes were flavored so delicately and the ingredients were so fresh that it was better than any meal we've eaten in any Vietnamese restaurant.

We kept noticing our little spy standing in the shadows and eventually coaxed her out to come sit with us. She was as curious about us as we were about her. She kept staring at my iPhone, so I picked it up to show her how to take a selfie.



That seemed to wipe away any language challenges as we posed for our glam shot. Once she was satisfied we got a good one, she gave us a little hug, waved goodbye and ran out to play with her friends. As good as this lunch was, the company was even better.

GRILLED EGGPLANT WITH TZATZIKI

During my college semester abroad, I made my way from Belgium all the way to Greece to meet up with my college roommate, Sarah. We spent a month on the southern side of Crete in the little beach town of Matala. We lived on grapes, chocolate

cookies, and beer, but once a week we would treat ourselves to a real meal and always order pastitsio, moussaka and grilled eggplant with tzatziki. I still don't have a great recipe for the pastitsio and moussaka, but this grilled eggplant dish has become a summer staple.

FOR TZATZIKI

1 cup finely grated cucumber
1 cup whole milk Greek yogurt
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1 tablespoon olive oil
2 garlic cloves, finely minced
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon sea salt
2 tablespoons chopped chives

FOR GRILLED EGGPLANT

2 tablespoons salt
1 cup warm water
5 cups cold water
2 large eggplants
Olive oil, for grill grates
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup olive oil
sea salt
chopped dill for garnish

PREPARATION

FOR TZATZIKI

Grate the cucumber using the large holes on a box grater. Squeeze as much water out as possible.

Place cucumber in bowl. Add in yogurt, lemon juice, olive oil, garlic, salt and chives. Stir to combine. Cover and refrigerate at least one-hour before serving.

FOR GRILLED EGGPLANT

In a large bowl, dissolve 2 tablespoons of salt into the warm water until the salt is dissolved. Add 5 cups of cold water and set aside.

Cut the eggplant into 3/4-inch thick rings and place them into the brine. Use a plate to hold down the eggplant so it is fully immersed in the water. Allow to soak for 45 minutes.

Remove eggplant and pat dry.

Oil grill grates and heat grill on medium-high. Brush both sides of each ring with olive oil. Season lightly with sea salt.

Place on grill until eggplant starts to brown, but not burn. Flip each and brown on other side, about 4-5 minutes each side.

Plate eggplant, drizzle tzatziki on top and garnish with dill.

BLACK BEAN BURGERS

If you're trying to cut back on meat, but miss the experience of burgers on the grill, here's a vegetarian version that will make you wonder why you ever ate meat in the first place. Okay, that may be an overpromise, but these bean burgers are

still pretty tasty.

INGREDIENTS (Makes 4 burgers)

1 (15.0-ounce) can black beans, drained and rinsed

1 egg

1/2 sweet onion, chopped

1 cup panko

1 tablespoon KK's Magic Rub*

1/2 teaspoon hot sauce

1/2 cup crumbled feta cheese

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive or canola oil

6 brioche buns

Ketchup, avocado, lettuce, tomato, red onion slices for garnish

PREPARATION

In a large bowl, mash the beans.

Add egg, onion, panko, magic rub, hot sauce and cheese. Mix well to combine, then shape into 4 patties.

Oil grates on grill. Bring grill to medium heat. Place patties on grill and cook for five minutes. Flip and cook for five minutes more until cooked through.

Transfer to buns.

Garnish with ketchup, avocado, lettuce, tomatoes and red onions. Or you can dress it up with an aioli, melted cheese or whatever else you like on your burgers.

***KK'S MAGIC RUB**

INGREDIENTS

2 Tbsp Paprika

2 Tbsp Kosher Salt

1 Tbsp Ground Pepper

2 Tbsp Garlic Powder

1 Tbsp Onion Powder

1 Tbsp Brown Sugar

2 tsp Chipotle powder

1 tsp Cayenne

1 tsp Dried oregano

1 tsp Cumin

PREPARATION

Mix all ingredients together.

Adjust to taste.

Store in airtight container. Best used within three months.