

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, cook 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.

KOHLRABI SLAW

One of my favorite things to do is wander through our weekend greenmarket. I like to pick up unusual vegetables and figure out what to do with them. Kohlrabi, with its weird tentacles, is one of those challenging vegetables I just can't resist. It's part of the cabbage family, so it's perfect for grating, and it remains fairly crunchy once dressed. I've given this a bit of an Asian twist and kick with the addition of wasabi mayonnaise.

INGREDIENTS

1 large kohlrabi, peeled, stemmed and grated

$\frac{1}{2}$ head Napa cabbage, grated

2 carrots, peeled and grated

$\frac{1}{2}$ red onion, sliced

3 scallions sliced into 1" pieces

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup wasabi mayonnaise (available in many Asian markets or on-line)

1-tablespoon vinegar

1-tablespoon honey

1-teaspoon salt

Freshly ground pepper

PREPARATION

Combine kohlrabi, cabbage, carrots, onion and scallions in a large bowl. Mix with hands to combine.

In a small bowl, whisk together wasabi mayonnaise, vinegar, honey, salt, and pepper.

Pour the dressing over the salad and gently toss, fully coating the salad.

Place in refrigerator for at least two hours before serving.

FIVE INGREDIENT MARINATED SKIRT STEAK

I'm not a huge red meat fan, but when I do eat it, I tend towards the cheaper cuts. If you marinate it, skirt steak is pretty hard to screw up. Because it's such a thin cut, it holds the flavors of the marinade throughout, even if you overcook it. But try not to overcook it.

INGREDIENTS

2 pounds skirt steak

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup duck sauce

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup soy sauce

salt and pepper to taste

PREPARATION

To tenderize the meat, use the dull side of a chef's knife and do quick chops at 45 degrees against the grain. Turn the meat 180 degrees and chop at the same 45 degree angle. Flip the meat over and repeat above.

Generously season steak with salt and pepper. Place in plastic Ziplock.

In separate bowl, combine duck sauce and soy sauce.

Pour mixture into Ziplock. Seal Ziplock and massage meat until mixture covers steak. Marinate in fridge for 4 – 6 hours, flipping it over in the fridge half way through.

Remove Ziplock from fridge 45 minutes before ready to grill, allowing meat to come to room temperature.

Heat grill to 400 degrees. With tongs, take out skirt steaks and place on grill. Discard sauce. Grill two to three minutes each side. Remove from grill and let rest for five minutes before slicing.

THE SPICE MARKET

It took me over four months to discover the most incredible spice market on full display just three blocks from my flat. I had been living and working in Singapore, but was so busy that I would often eat or pick up groceries near my office, rather than my own neighborhood. On a rare day off, I decided to explore on foot and was thrilled with what I found.

I was living in Little India, one of the less affluent neighborhoods in town. It's always busy with tourists trying to find a good deal and locals pouring into the many restaurants for fish head curry and cheap beer. Just along the main drag, there was a market – Tekka Centre – that I must have walked past at least twenty times without going in. What a mistake! From the outside it didn't seem like much, but inside was an international food fest. There were aisles upon aisles of food stalls with every Southeast Asian cuisine and dish you can imagine – everything from *Pak Kashmiri Delight's Aloo Gobi* (a simple Indian vegetarian dish made with potatoes, cauliflower, spices and herbs) to *Whampoa's Prawn Noodles*, (a Hokkien noodle soup made with pork bones and prawn stock).



People sat at communal tables slurping their soups and dipping their *chapati* (Indian flat bread) into colorful, aromatic sauces. It didn't matter that the inside temperature was ninety-degrees and rising. Somehow the spices from the dishes

seemed to regulate everyone's body temperature.



After filling my belly with some *murtabak*, (a thin dough stuffed with minced meat, onions, and eggs), I headed deeper into the market past the stalls into the shopping area. From on high, it's a cavernous space selling every ingredient known to mankind, and then some. Exotic vegetables, glorious ripe fruits, local chickens and fish, a butcher shop with lamb carcasses dangling on hooks, dried anchovies, teas and coffees from around the globe, and dried spices so brilliant in color you could wet them and use them as paint.



Stopped in my tracks, I eyed the gorgeous spices wondering which ones I would need to make a lamb *korma*.

“Can I help you?” asked the handsome merchant.

“Well, I’ve been trying my skills at different curries, but I never really get the right balance. I was hoping to make a lamb *korma*.”

“Ah, that’s one of my favorites too. I’ll put together my secret mix for you.”



I wondered if he says that to all the ladies, but just as the thought crossed my mind, he started to spoon out at least a dozen different spices into one bag, then proceeded to recite the recipe to me.

“And once you’ve tried the dish, I expect you to come back and let me know how it turned out,” he said smiling, handing me the bag, “Just ask for Rakesh.”

Rakesh did not steer me wrong. The *korma* was delicious and his recipe was spot on. Each week I would return to the market to let him know how my dishes were turning out and each week he would send me on my way with a new spice mix and recipe. He became my first friend away from the office and made me feel like a welcomed addition to the neighborhood.