

COLCANNON

Next Wednesday is St. Patrick's Day. And Irish or not, everyone will be wearing something green and looking for some corned beef and cabbage. What we think of as the traditional corned beef and cabbage is really an Irish-American invention, from Boston and New York. The Irish in the Old Country were too poor to eat that much beef. They did eat cabbage however, and one traditional Irish dish is colcannon, a dish of cabbage, potatoes and leeks or green onions.

You'll need 2 pounds of potatoes, either russet or Yukon gold, peeled and cut into roughly 1 ½ inch chunks, one small head or half a large head of cabbage, about a pound, cored and cut into roughly 1 inch pieces, and a couple of leeks, the white part only, cleaned and chopped. To clean a leek, cut off the green part and discard. Then, keeping the root end intact, slice the white part lengthwise into quarters. Thoroughly swish the white part in a large bowl of water to remove all the sand and grit. Then using the root end as your handle, slice the leek into ½ inch slices until you get to the root end and then discard the root end.

If you don't have any leeks, use 2 bunches of green onions, the white part only, trimmed and chopped. If you're using green onions, finely chop the green parts of one bunch for use as a garnish. Save the green parts of the other bunch for a salad. You'll also need half a cup of milk or half and half, warmed in the microwave, half a stick of softened butter (or a little bit more), about ¾ of a teaspoon of salt and some freshly ground black pepper.

In a large saucepan or Dutch oven, place the 2 pounds of peeled potatoes, cut into 1 ½ inch chunks. Add cold water, just to cover. On top of the potatoes, pile on the chopped leeks or green onions and the pound of cabbage, cored and cut into 1-inch pieces. Bring the mixture to the boil and then lower the heat, cover, and cook until the potatoes are tender, about 20 minutes. Then drain the mixture in a colander and return the cooked potatoes, cabbage and green onions or leeks back to the pan.

Over low heat, mash the mixture with a potato masher, adding ½ cup of milk or half and half, which you've warmed in the microwave, plus half a stick or more of softened butter, about ¾ of a teaspoon of salt, or to taste, and some freshly ground black pepper. When the mixture is coarsely mashed, taste, adjust the seasonings and serve, garnished with the chopped green onions if you're using them.

I like to serve this with corned beef. Here's my non-traditional and dead-easy method of cooking corned beef. Get a piece of corned beef brisket, and trim off as much of the fat as you can reasonably manage. I like to get a piece of extra-lean corned beef from Swingle's, but whatever you get at the supermarket will work fine. Throw away the package of seasonings. Soak the beef in a large bowl of cold water for half an hour or so to remove the excess salt.

Put the beef in your crock pot and scoop a 6-ounce can of frozen orange juice over the meat. Cover and cook on low for about 8 hours or on high for 5 hours. Remove, slice and serve. That's all there is to it. It's so easy I'm almost embarrassed to tell you about it, but it's too good to pass up.

I like to serve this with some carrots cooked with orange and dill. Into a stainless-steel or non-reactive saucepan, put a pound of carrots, peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks, about 3 cups of carrots. Add ¾ cup of freshly squeezed orange juice, ½ teaspoon of salt, and ½ teaspoon of freshly ground black pepper. Bring the mixture to the boil and boil, uncovered, over medium-high heat for 15 to 20 minutes, until the carrots are tender, all the liquid has evaporated, and the carrots are beginning to glaze in the butter. Sprinkle about ¼ cup of chopped fresh dill over the carrots, stir and serve.

Wishing you all a safe and sane St. Patrick's Day, this is Steve Muni for the Hometown Kitchen.