

CORNED BEEF AND CABBAGE

Although corned beef and cabbage is a traditional St. Patrick's Day dish, it's not traditional Irish cooking. The Irish, when they came to this country in the late 1840s, were too poor to eat beef. Once over here however, things were looking up. So the Irish immigrants took the traditional New England boiled dinner and adapted it into the corned beef and cabbage that we know today. You can cook the dish in the traditional Irish-American way, in boiling liquid, but here's a version that's easier and I think tastier.

First of all, get out your old crock pot or slow cooker. Get a nice piece of corned beef brisket—I like the extra-lean cuts at Swingle's Meat Market in Jackson. Soak the corned beef in a large bowl of cold water for half an hour to remove some of the salt. Place the corned beef in your crock pot, and add the contents of a 6-ounce can of frozen orange juice concentrate. Cover and cook on high for 5 to 6 hours, or on low for 8 to 10 hours. Take it out and serve. Really—that's all there is to it.

I like to serve the corned beef with some horseradish on the side, either plain, or the kind that's mixed with cream for a milder taste. Or if you prefer mustard, try a whole-grain mustard, or a hot and sweet variety.

Now for the cabbage. For this dish, being non-traditional when it comes to St. Patrick's Day, I leave the Emerald Isle far behind, traveling south to Italy. This is a recipe by Biba Caggiano, who runs Sacramento's finest Italian restaurant, Biba. Take a medium-size head of cabbage—I prefer Savoy cabbage, the curly-leaf kind, as it has a milder flavor—but ordinary cabbage will do just fine. Pull off any bruised or tattered outer leaves, cut the cabbage in half, cut out the core, and slice the halves into shreds. Put the cabbage shreds into a large covered frying-pan.

Add a cup of water, a cup of dry white wine or dry vermouth, half a cup of extra-virgin olive oil, a pinch of salt, and a healthy pinch of dried red pepper flakes—the amount depends on your fondness for spicy foods. Bring to a boil and cover, cooking the cabbage over medium heat until it is soft, about 20 minutes or so, stirring from time to time. Uncover the frying-pan and turn up the heat to high. Stirring often, sauté the cabbage until the liquid is all gone and the cabbage is a nice golden color. Add more salt if necessary, and serve.

If potatoes are required, I simply pan-fry some in more olive oil, with some fresh herbs. Peel 4-6 medium russet potatoes. Cut them in half and then cut the halves cross-wise into 1-inch wide pieces. Heat ¼ cup of olive oil in a frying pan over medium heat—I like to use a non-stick pan for this one. Add a couple of peeled cloves of garlic, cut in half, and sauté for a minute or so, until the garlic turns golden, then pull the garlic cloves out of the oil and discard them. Add the potato slices and turn them in the oil to make sure they're completely coated with oil. Add 3-4 fresh sage leaves or a couple of sprigs of fresh rosemary, a couple of pinches of salt, and some freshly ground black pepper. Cover the pan, turn the heat to low, and let the potatoes steam in the hot oil, turning them from time to time, for about 10-15 minutes. Remove the cover, turn the heat up to high, and fry the potatoes, stirring often, until they get a little crusty.

One of my listeners wrote me asking about dishes that can be served with beer—and this is a dinner that just cries out for beer. I'd serve a Guinness stout to those who like it, or my personal choice would be a micro-brew amber served cool, not cold. Or if you really want a cold beer, try a Harp Lager in honor of the occasion.

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