

Laura's Local Dish

November 14-20, 2014

You say potato, I say potahto...

LET'S MAKE BOTH

By Laura Pensiero, RD

The arrival of the holiday season first brings to mind the harvest Thanksgiving table. While later holiday feasts definitely delight -- and, unfortunately, fatten us up for the long winter ahead-- Thanksgiving is mostly about celebrating the harvest, breaking bread with those you love (even if you don't like them).

Aside from the normal family tensions, heated political and sports debates,

burned rolls left in the oven, and general misbehavior, I find one food item can always get conversations started. The mashed potato.

Everyone has an opinion, and no one is right. It starts with consistency: smashed, mashed, pureed, whipped. (I'm going to lump, so to speak, mashed,

pureed, and whipped together going forward here, since they are often considered interchangeably.) So let's discuss smashed versus mashed.

Classic mashed, along with the often fluffier whipped potatoes, are typically considered to be the more refined and traditional version. Smashed? What lazy clod would boil a few potatoes then simply smash, season, and send it to the table? Actually, many of us, and they're good.

For this chunkier version, a masher and a little arm strength are the essentials. After draining the tender potatoes, choose whether or not to remove the skins (not necessary, especially with red, new, or smaller waxy potatoes, or even Yukon Gold).

There are many approaches to creating the classic creamy and fluffy mashed potatoes. For this style I'd stick with a starchier potato like Russet or Yukon Gold. As for equipment, I'm a fan of the potato ricer. This device is inexpensive and results in drier rice-like pieces of potato that can

then be the base to which butter, warmed milk and/or cream and seasonings can be folded into. The traditional mixer (standing or hand held) works, but you run the risk of over-mixing and getting a gluey sticky mess. Unlike smashed potatoes, which can be enjoyed skin on or off, mashed potatoes should be peeled before cooking. Alternately they can be peeled when still warm after. I find

the easiest and fastest course is to peel and cube them before cooking in salted water. Drain them and then pull out your ricer or mixer.

Just to get the dialogue a little spicier, how about all of the potential additions to either smashed or mashed potatoes... garlic,

herbs, mushrooms, sautéed onions, cheese, sour cream, peas, etc. Mix some mashed turnip or rutabaga into your Thanksgiving potatoes. You'll love it--even as you hear every kid in the room scream, "Why'd you go and ruin the mashed potatoes!"

Some tips to get the potatoes just right:

Always cook in salted water.

Pick the right potato for the right preparation (waxy for smashed, starchy for mashed).

Always heat the milk and/or cream and butter before adding to mashed or smashed potatoes.

Don't over mix, mash, or fold.

More butter (or oil) isn't always better.

Laura Pensiero, a registered dietician, is founder and creative force behind Gigi Hudson Valley, which operates the award-winning Gigi Trattoria in Rhinebeck, and a catering business. She currently offers a Thanksgiving menu order for pickup or delivery service accessible at www.gigihudsonvalley.com/thanksgivingorder.



Photo: Laura Pensiero

Olive oil smashed potatoes.

Classic Mashed Potatoes

Makes 6 to 8 servings

2 pounds Russet or Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and cut into 2-inch chunks

1 tablespoon salt plus more to taste

1 1/3 cups milk or half-and-half (or a 1:1 ratio of both)

4 tablespoons unsalted butter

Freshly ground black pepper

Bring large pot of salted water to boil. Add potatoes, reduce heat to medium, and simmer until tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Drain potatoes. Heat milk with butter in small saucepan over medium heat until butter is melted; set aside. Press hot, drained potatoes through ricer into large mixing bowl. Slowly add milk/butter mixture, folding into the potatoes in quarter-cup increments. Season to taste with salt and pepper and transfer to a serving bowl.



Classic mashed potatoes.

Olive Oil Smashed Potatoes

Makes 6 to 8 servings

So simple! If you want to spike this up, consider sautéing some thyme leaves and thinly sliced garlic cloves in another tablespoon or two of olive oil and folding it into smashed potatoes.

2 pounds small-medium Yukon gold potatoes

1 tablespoon salt

5 tablespoons excellent quality extra-virgin olive oil

Sea salt and ground white pepper to taste

Place potatoes in a large saucepan and add enough cold water to cover them a few inches. Season the water with salt and bring to a boil. Cook until potatoes are tender but still hold their shape, 15 to 30 minutes depending on size and shape. Drain potatoes and let stand until cool enough to handle.

Peel potatoes (or not) and mash them with a handheld potato masher until blended but slightly chunky. Gently stir in the olive oil and season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve hot.

Local potatoes

RSK Farms
13255 Route 23A, Prattsville, NY
518-299-3198

Brittany Hollow Farm
150 Route 9 North, Rhinebeck, NY
845-758-3276