

Travel the World without Leaving Your Kitchen

International Cooking Series

Traditions from the Emerald Isle

Most of us can passionately describe a delicious recipe or meal that someone in our family has passed down for generations and the ensuing joy of sharing the dish around the table. Exploring, learning, and embracing cultural food traditions, both our own and others', can broaden our perspectives about history and cultures from around the world. Whether you experience these cultural differences in eating while traveling, visiting a restaurant in your community, or by preparing them at home, it can help you celebrate the cultural diversity found in all our communities. So, let's travel the world without leaving your kitchen, and experience the traditions of Ireland, commonly referred to as the Emerald Isle.



History of Food

Ireland is known for its lush green, rolling hills, which have inspired its nickname of the Emerald Isle. Ireland is situated in the North Atlantic, having a mild, moist climate with plentiful rainfall. While the weather is good for growing potatoes, the island has much more to offer, drawing on ingredients available from the moors, pastures, and sea. The land is ideal for livestock farming: primarily cattle, sheep, horses, and pigs. Irish dairies provide life-sustaining milk, butter, and cheese. Surrounded by the sea, and containing more than 12,000 lakes, you can see how fish and seafood would become a staple ingredient.

The biggest food influences in Ireland came from the arrival of the Celts in 600 to 500 B.C., the

Vikings in the 16th century, and English colonization in the 17th century. The once popular cereal crops, such as wheat, barley, and oats, were replaced with potatoes. A potato blight destroyed the crop that the Irish peasants depended on for food and led to the famine of 1845-1849. Millions died or emigrated to the United States and the United Kingdom.

Ireland continued to have periods of unrest that exploded in violence beginning in the late 1960s. This time is called the Troubles and lasted until the late 1990s. After centuries of poverty and suffering, Ireland is now a prosperous, modern country with much to offer, especially in the culinary landscape. If you are lucky enough to visit an Irish pub, you will find a casual and friendly atmosphere; hearty food,

including traditional Irish dishes like Irish stew, boxty, and Irish soda bread; the well-known Guinness beer and Irish whiskies, such as Bushmills and Jameson; a rousing sports game on TV; or local music. The good news is you don't have to travel far to experience a taste of Ireland. Below you will find some traditional dishes to help you get started.

St. Patrick's Day - Then and Now

March 17 marks the death of St. Patrick, the missionary credited with converting pagans to Christianity in Ireland. For thousands of years, the Irish have observed a religious day to commemorate the death of St. Patrick in the 5th century. Since around the 10th century, on this day, Irish families would attend church in the morning and celebrate in the afternoon with a big feast. Lenten prohibitions against eating meat were waived, so they could take a break from the fast and enjoy the feast in its entirety. Over the years, the observance has evolved and grown into the big celebration of Irish culture we see today. But most of these St. Patrick Day traditions began in the United States.

Parades, dyed green beer and rivers, wearing green or shamrocks, eating corned beef and cabbage, drinking Irish beer or whiskey, and the infamous leprechaun with a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, are all ways Americans have celebrated St. Patrick's Day. The first parade took place in America and not in Ireland. New York and Boston held parades to support their Irish immigrants in the 1700's. But recent findings show the first celebration and parade were held in 1600 and 1601, respectively, in a Spanish colony now known as St. Augustine, Florida.

While Irish pubs did a good business in the U.S. on March 17, pubs in Ireland were prohibited from being open because it was a holy day. It wasn't until the invention of television that the Irish saw what was happening around the world. They launched a multiday St. Patrick's Day Festival in Dublin in 1996. If you visit, don't expect to find any green beer. You can, however, join over 100,000



people enjoying musical performances, Celtic stories, lessons on Irish cooking, children's activities, comedy specials, and more. The week-long festival ends with an amazing parade, full of marching bands from all over the world, floats, costumes, and lots of fun entertainment.

Traditional Irish Foods

The most traditional Irish meal is Bacon and Cabbage, not Corned Beef. Yes, you read that right. Corned beef is not actually an authentic Irish dish. And the Irish bacon is not the pork belly bacon we use in the U.S. It is a cured loin and back fat of pigs, almost impossible to find in the U.S. It is surmised that in the late 19th century, Irish immigrants in New York may have switched to corned beef because of the expense and low availability of back bacon. And while cabbage is a dish served in Ireland, colcannon, which consists of creamy mashed potatoes combined with cabbage or kale, is more common.

Slow Cooker Corned Beef and Cabbage

Yield: 8 servings

Prep time: 20 minutes

Cook time: 8 hours

Nutritional analysis per serving: 430cal;
26g fat; 90mg cholesterol; 1078mg sodium;
22g carbohydrate; 27g protein

Ingredients

- 3 pounds corned beef brisket (with pickling spices)
- 4 medium yellow potatoes, cut into 1-inch pieces
- 4 large carrots, peeled and cut into 2-inch pieces
- ½ medium head cabbage, cored and cut into wedges
- About 1 quart water

Instructions

1. Place corned beef brisket in a 6-quart slow cooker. Place potatoes and carrots over meat. Sprinkle with pickling spice. Add enough water to cover meat by about 1-inch.
2. Add lid and cook 8 hours on HIGH.
3. After seven hours, add cabbage. Cover the slow cooker and cook an additional hour.
4. Remove corned beef brisket to a serving platter and slice thinly across the grain.
5. Serve with vegetables and spoon some of the liquid over the beef for added flavor.

Note: Corned beef is preserved with salt, so the sodium level is extremely high for a 4-ounce serving. To make your corned beef less salty, soak it in cold water for about 30 minutes per pound and rinse just before cooking. If your corned beef doesn't come with pickling spice, you can make your own with 2 bay leaves, 2 teaspoons black peppercorns, 4 whole allspice berries, and 2 whole cloves. If you don't have a slow cooker, you may prepare the corned beef and cabbage recipe in a large Dutch oven or large stockpot on top of the stove. Cover



the corned beef with water and simmer for around 3 hours. In the last 30 minutes, add the potatoes and carrots. In the last 15 minutes, add the cabbage. Meat should reach 145 degrees Fahrenheit and the vegetables should be fork tender.

No one ingredient is synonymous with Irish cuisine as much as potatoes. So much so that it is almost hard to believe that potatoes didn't arrive in Ireland until the late 16th century. The early integration into Irish cuisine has led to a wide variety of potato dishes that are still popular today. One of those is colcannon, which is simply mashed potatoes with kale or cabbage. If you were enjoying this dish around Halloween, you might want to look closely because your potatoes could be telling your fortune. In the past, charms were mixed into the colcannon to celebrate Halloween. If you found a button or a thimble you would remain a bachelor for the coming year. A coin would signify that you were coming into wealth, and a ring meant you would get married.



Colcannon

Yield: 4 servings

Prep time: 20 minutes

Cook time: 30 minutes

Nutritional analysis per ½ cup serving: 270cal, 2g fat, 20mg cholesterol, 30mg sodium, 48g carbohydrates, 5g protein

Ingredients

- 2 pounds Russet or mealy textured potatoes, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes
- 1 cup kale or cabbage, shredded or rough cut
- ½ cup 2% milk
- 2 tablespoons butter, divided
- ¼ teaspoon pepper
- Fresh parsley or chives for garnish

Note: You can use different liquids in place of water, such as milk, sparkling water, and beer, but this will change the stated nutritional analysis.

Instructions

1. In a medium saucepan, over high heat, add potatoes and cover with water. Bring to a boil and cook until fork tender, about 10 minutes. Drain the water completely off the potatoes.
2. Add milk and 1 tablespoon of butter. Heat, over medium heat until the butter melts and the milk starts to steam. Do not boil. Remove from heat.
3. With a potato masher or fork, mash the potatoes, but do not overmix or use a mixer. Set aside.
4. In a separate small saucepan, over high heat, bring ½ cup of water to a boil. Add the kale or cabbage and blanch for 2 to 4 minutes, until wilted; it will be slightly underdone. Drain and add 1 tablespoon of butter and mash together, until butter melts.
5. Mix the cabbage thoroughly through the mashed potato. Sprinkle with parsley, if desired. Serve immediately.

Soda bread became a staple in Irish households because it was cheap, easy to make, and used just a few ingredients. The bread itself is slightly sour, with a hard crust. Today, you find many variations, from added sugar and dried fruits for a sweet flavor to caraway seeds and cheese for a savory flavor. The recipe below is your standard soda bread that is often enjoyed hot with a little bit of butter.

Soda Bread

Yield: 1 loaf, 16 slices

Prep time: 20 minutes

Cook time: 30 minutes

Nutritional analysis per slice: 120 calories, 1g fat, 260mg sodium, 24g carbohydrates, 5 grams protein

Ingredients

- 2 cups all-purpose flour
- 2 cups whole-wheat flour
- 1 ½ teaspoons baking soda
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- 2 cups low-fat buttermilk
- Cooking spray
- Extra flour for kneading

Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 450 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. In a large bowl, mix the flours, baking soda, and salt together completely.
3. Add buttermilk to flour mixture. Stir until you have a sticky dough ball.
4. Turn dough out onto a generously floured surface. Knead gently 4 to 5 times.
5. Shape the dough into an 8-inch round loaf. Using a sharp knife, cut a deep cross into the dough.
6. Place the round loaf on a lightly coated or parchment-covered baking pan.



7. Bake at 450 degrees Fahrenheit for 15 minutes before reducing the oven temperature to 400 degrees for an additional 15 minutes. The loaf should sound hollow when tapped.

8. Remove from baking pan to a wire rack to cool before slicing.

Note: Cutting a cross on top of your soda bread before baking provides an evenly shaped loaf. Legend has it that this allows the fairies to escape or to ward off evil spirits. For a sweeter bread, add ¼ cup sugar and 1 cup of dried raisins. For a savory loaf, add 1 tablespoon each of fresh chopped dill, tarragon, and thyme. If your bread is too dense, try adding 1 teaspoon baking powder.

Porridges are common in many cultures across the world. Irish Oats in Ireland are traditionally made with steel cut oats. Steel cut oats and rolled oats are both made from oat groats (oat kernels with no husk). Rolled oats are made by steaming and flattening the groats, while steel cut oats are made by cutting the groats into smaller pieces. Rolled oats take less time to cook and end in a smoother texture. They are often used in baking and cooking. Steel cut oats take more time to cook but result in a much chewier texture. You can add whatever you wish to the basic recipe below for a hearty way to start your day.

Irish Porridge

Yield: 4 servings

Prep time: 5 minutes

Cook time: 20 minutes

Nutritional analysis ½ cup serving: 150 calories, 2.5g fat, 80mg sodium, 27g carbohydrates, 5g protein

Ingredients

- 1 cup steel cut oats
- 3 cups water (or milk)
- ⅛ teaspoon salt

Instructions

1. In a medium pan, over medium heat, combine all ingredients. Bring to a boil.
2. Once it starts to thicken, reduce the heat and simmer for about 20 minutes, or until the porridge has a smooth and creamy consistency. Stir often.
3. Remove from heat and cool slightly before serving.

Note: Adding milk will make the porridge creamier. Drizzle with honey or add chocolate nibs, brown sugar, cinnamon, fruits, or nuts for more variety.

The Irish Dairy

Ireland is the 10th largest dairy export nation in the world, exporting 85% of all dairy products to more than 145 countries. Butter, cheese, infant formula, milk and cream, whole milk powder, and whey are the biggest exports. There are several cheeses that are readily available in the U.S. that you should try on your next charcuterie board or on your next salad. Cashel blue is a farmhouse blue cheese perfect for your next spinach and beet salad. Dubliner is a mature Cheddar cheese made by Kerrygold™. Cahill Farm Cheddar with Porter Ale is mixed with a dark porter ale during the cheese-making process that gives it a meaty flavor with dark brown veins.

There are many Irish recipes available at your local library or from websites. Not all will be authentic or traditional, but exploring the culture and foods of modern day Ireland will be a treat!

References

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