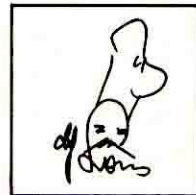


The Culinary Art of Hungary

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HUNGARIAN STYLE POTATO SOUP (KRUMPLILEVES)

Potato soup seems to be one of the most frequently eaten dishes in Hungary during the last 150 years.

Hard to believe, but 200 years ago this staple was practically unknown, not only in Hungary but in a large part of Europe. Then potatoes became so important that the years when the potato crop was low are remembered as years of famine.

Among all the cookbooks, the very first one in which the potato is mentioned as the "apple of the ground", was written by a Hungarian immigrant from Transylvania, who became the personal chef of Maximilian, the Holy Roman Emperor. The book was published in 1587.

The potato originated in the middle part of the American continent, somewhere in the northern part of South America, or in the southernmost region of North America. The first potatoes were brought to Europe by Columbus during his third voyage.

Now it would be hard to imagine the national cuisine of the English, the French, the Germans, the Russians, or other European nations, including the Hungarians, without pota-

toes. And, of course, potato soup is characteristic of the cuisine wherever the potato grows.

Hungarian potato soup is somewhat similar to others, but the method, as the Hungarians prepare it, the spices added to it, and the way it is embellished, make it different and distinctively our own.

It is among the dishes eaten in Hungary during the last 100 years, for breakfast, lunch and dinner, hot and cold. In many instances it was a meal in itself.

Here is a recipe that you can easily follow. This recipe is basic for a large family of soups you can create by adding various ingredients. In some parts of Hungary, dried marjoram is added. In other parts, a few bruised caraway seeds are sauteed together with the onion. During Lent, it is made with vegetable oil, and for each portion a whole egg is broken into the soup.

If you add some good Hungarian sausage, it will be truly a meal in itself. Or you can start it by boiling a ham hock or the leftover bones of the Christmas ham. If so, be careful with the salt.

POTATO SOUP

8 servings

4 tablespoons shortening, preferably lard, bacon drippings, or a mixture of lard and oil
4 cups potatoes, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch cubes
1/2 cup chopped flat-leaf parsley
1 cup finely minced onion
1 bay leaf

1-1/2 teaspoons salt
1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
5 cups water, chicken stock, or chicken broth
2 cups light cream or half-and half
4 tablespoons flour
1 cup sour cream (optional)
Additional chopped parsley for decoration

1. In a large soup pot, melt the shortening and saute the potatoes with parsley, chopped onion, bay leaf, salt, and pepper over medium heat.

2. Cook, covered, over low heat for 15 to 20 minutes.

3. Add the stock (or water or both) and continue cooking.

4. Mix the light cream with the flour and stir into the soup. Keep stirring while pouring so that no lumps form.

5. Simmer the soup for at least 30 minutes.

6. Serve with additional cream (or egg yolk and cream mixture, as in other cream soups) or, just before serving, stir in sour cream. Sprinkle the top with additional chopped parsley or with chopped chives.