

Julia Child's Mashed Potatoes (for 6)

INGREDIENTS:

4 or 5 large baking potatoes

Salt

1/2 C or so milk and/or cream, heated in a saucepan

2 or more TBS softened butter

Freshly ground white pepper

Special equipment suggested: a potato ricer or an electric mixer

DIRECTIONS:

Preliminary cooking: You may bake or steam the potatoes whole before mashing, or boil them in pieces as suggested here. Wash/peel the potatoes - cut into quarters. Set in saucepan with lightly salted water to cover (1 1/2 tsp salt per quart of water). Bring to the boil, cover loosely, and boil 10-15 minutes or longer till potatoes are tender when pierced with a knife. Cut a piece in half and eat a bit to be sure they are just done; undercooked potatoes will not mash properly. Drain water from pan (you may wish to save it for soup making); toss potatoes over moderate heat for a moment till they begin to film the pan - this is to evaporate excess moisture.

(Child's mashing note: "Home-style mashed potatoes are becoming trendy in bistro-type restaurants at this writing, and they're careful to leave in some lumps so we'll presume they're not instant mashed. Or perhaps they use instant plus one or two lumpily mashed fresh potatoes. Hmm!")

Seasoning: Beat in dribbles of hot milk and/or cream, alternating with half-tablespoons of butter -- careful not to make them too soft - season with salt and pepper to taste. The sooner you can serve them, the better.

Ahead of time note: If you cannot serve at once, beat in only a minimum of milk, etc. Turn potatoes into a saucepan if you have used an electric mixer. Set in another pan of hot but not simmering water, and cover potatoes loosely -- they must stay warm to retain their fresh quality, and they must have air circulation or they develop an off taste. At serving time, bring the water to simmer, beating potatoes with a wooden spoon; then beat in more hot milk or cream and soft butter to your taste.

Recipe courtesy Alfred A. Knopf Publishers