

A Short History of Irish Cuisine

CIARAN GANTLY,
EXECUTIVE CHEF AT THE
GALWAY BAY HOTEL
GIVES US A HISTORY
LESSON IN IRISH FOOD
AND A ST. PATRICK'S DAY
RECIPE TO TRY AT HOME.

A majority of Irish people think of Irish cuisine as being represented by 'the potato'. It is not widely known that before the introduction of the potato to our shores, our diet was one of the richest in all of Europe.

Due to our temperate climate, we had an abundance of quality fresh ingredients throughout the whole year. Irish cuisine began its history, as a cuisine based on meat and dairy products supplemented with seafood in coastal regions. Around the 8th Century, the production of vegetables became the practice of most households, replacing the dependence on wild and forest products. With this practice the standard of living improved and the wealth of new dishes increased greatly.

This wholesome diet ensured that the Irish dined as well as the most sophisticated diner of today and it is only in the past 50 years that the Irish diet is beginning to return to what it was at the start of the eighth century.

After the arrival of the Normans in Ireland the rights of the people to utilise the natural resources of the land (hunting and collecting wild vegetables) were severely restricted. During this time our diet suffered and many families struggled to survive.

With the introduction of the potato, a plentiful and cheap food source, the population increased greatly especially among the poor or displaced. The potato, by providing a means of population increase, also provided for the disasters that followed. Yet no meal today in Ireland would be complete without potatoes.

No other nation in the world had their cuisine changed so drastically as the Irish. The diet and cuisine of the Irish was changed completely by the introduction of one vegetable and to this day the memory of the people of Ireland, their diet, their cuisine, and their history is tied up in events related to that vegetable - the potato.

Here is Ciaran's St. Patrick's Day Chicken recipe for you to try at home:

Supreme of Corn-fed Chicken stuffed with Colcannon, wrapped in Smoked Panchetta with Parsley infused Bacon Broth

Serves 4

Ingredients:

4 x Corn-fed Chicken Supremes
8 slices Smoked Panchetta
200g Potatoes
100g Cabbage
1 x Spring onions
100g Butter
1dl Cream
2dl Chicken stock
1dl Milk
1 bunch of Fresh parsley
1dl Olive Oil
Fresh Nutmeg to taste
Salt and Pepper to taste

Method:

- To prepare the Colcannon, boil the potatoes in plenty of salted water.
- When cooked, strain and mash. Add cream and season with salt, pepper and freshly grated nutmeg.
- Finely shred the cabbage and sauté in 50grams of butter until soft, add the sliced scallion and add to the mashed potato.
- Make an incision in the chicken supreme and stuff with the colcannon mixture. Then wrap each supreme with a slice of smoked Panchetta.
- Place the supremes on a baking tray and brush with melted butter. Bake in a moderately hot oven 180°C for approximately 30 minutes.
- To prepare the sauce, cut four slices of Panchetta into long thin strips, place in a small pot together with the chicken stock and bring to the boil.
- Remove the parsley from the stalks and wash thoroughly, add salt and olive oil. Using a liquidizer, blend to produce a rich green parsley oil.
- Pass the bacon infused chicken broth through a fine sieve to remove the bacon bits. Add the milk to the stock and heat, taking care not to boil.
- Remove the chicken from the oven and leave to rest before carving.
- Finish off the sauce by adding the parsley oil to the broth and liquidise to produce a froth.
- To serve, place the chicken in the centre of the plate, coat with the parsley froth and drizzle around with the remaining parsley oil.
- Garnish with roasted vine cherry tomatoes.



Ciaran Gantly, Executive Chief at the Galway Bay Hotel

