



No One's an Orphan on Thanksgiving Day & Smashed or Mashed Potatoes

Fall 2013/Volume 372

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Yes, yes, I know, we're barely done with Halloween and already I'm talking about Thanksgiving. In my defense, Thanksgiving has got to be the greatest foodie event of the year. Of course there are lots of other holidays with fabulous meals but none are devoted to feasting. Christmas dinner is great but still secondary to Santa. While Independence Day cookouts are delicious, they are just the lead-in to the fabulous fireworks. Easter has the bunny, Halloween has witches, ghouls and ghosts and both have enough candy to render dinner superfluous. Thanksgiving is all about the feast, the loved ones around the table and, okay, maybe a little football.

So while it may be a little early to work on your shopping list, it is not too early to think about the guest list. Especially if you are alone this Thanksgiving or know someone who might be looking for a little company on Turkey Day.



When I first moved to Switzerland, I couldn't help but feel a little homesick as Thanksgiving approached. It would be my first Turkey Day away from home. Lucky for me, a colleague decided to throw a party. Better yet, she drafted me as her co-host and sous-chef.

Since Thursday was not a holiday in Switzerland, we celebrated on Saturday. By mid-morning, I was in Linda's kitchen, sporting an apron and brandishing a potato peeler. We peeled pounds of potatoes, baked pies, simmered cranberry sauce, steamed beans and stuffed and roasted a fat turkey. Tasty aromas began to fill the apartment as we shared stories of home and Thanksgivings' past. At seven, the doorbell started to ring and we shared our delicious labors with a dozen or so expatriates from the US and around the world.

Linda left Switzerland the next summer but I stuck around to throw many more Thanksgiving dinners. It was always a fun and lively affair. Then and now, the most important tradition, more important than the turkey or cranberry sauce, is that no one should be alone on Thanksgiving. Admittedly, only my American friends truly appreciated this sentiment. So while my guest list was a veritable United Nations of nationalities, a few extra Americans always seemed to find my Thanksgiving table.

It would start with a phone call (make that two or three) to add a holiday orphan (make that two or three). "My brother (sister, cousins, best friend from kindergarten) is visiting, can he/she/they come to Thanksgiving?" Or "My office mate (neighbors, new sweetheart, running buddy) is American and has no plans for Thanksgiving. Can I bring him/her/them along?" As my friend Kevin wisely noted, "There is always room for one more at Thanksgiving."

As the tally grew, I put out an SOS for extra chairs and devised a makeshift extension to my table for eight with sawhorses and an old plank. One year, nineteen people squeezed into around the table. Somewhat miraculously, everyone managed to get enough to eat. My apartment's tiny oven could barely hold a twelve-pound turkey. Luckily, one of the extras was a chef and he carved the bird with both biblical and surgical skill.

If it looks like you'll be alone this Thanksgiving, take it as a sign and create a festive gathering of holiday orphans. And for anyone with lots of family and old friends gathering for turkey, why not add that colleague or neighbor who is far from home? Either way, the more the merrier!

Have a wonderful gathering of family, old friends, new friends and soon-to-be friends. Bon appétit!

Smashed or Mashed Potatoes

Thanksgiving is filled with family food traditions. My mother always mashed her potatoes with sour cream and they were delicious. Mom's spuds were smooth but I prefer chunky so I give them a rough smash. Take your pick and enjoy!

Serves 12 or more

About 5 pounds red skinned or Yukon gold potatoes
About 6 ounces (1 1/2 sticks) or to taste butter, cut into small pieces
1/2-1 cup sour cream
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Scrub and peel (or not) the potatoes and cut into 1-2 inch cubes. Although my mother always peeled the potatoes, I like to leave the skins on.

Put the potatoes and 1 tablespoon butter in a large pot. Add enough salted water to cover and bring to a rapid boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to medium-low and simmer, partially covered, until just tender, about 10 minutes.

Drain the potatoes in a large colander and return them to the pot.

Add the sour cream and remaining butter to the potatoes and season with nutmeg, salt and pepper. Stir/smash with a large spoon or potato masher until everything is well combined but the potatoes are still chunky.



Alternatively, follow my mother's lead and, using an electric mixer, whip until smooth. (Don't overbeat or the spuds will turn to glue. Unlike my mother, I use a potato ricer instead of an electric mixer when I want very smooth mashed potatoes.)