

CHICKEN AND DUMPLINGS

I did not grow up knowing chicken and dumplings. There were a great number of wonderful foods I was either deprived of or deprived myself of in my youth: bbq ribs, meatloaf and seared duck breasts among them. But a family friend, Mary Lay, introduced my family to the revelation that is chicken and dumplings. I remember staring into the huge pot she brought over one day. It was literally a pot of gold. Delicious golden chicken fat floating on the top with those precious, fluffy dumplings. I had spent the early years of my life on some kind of diet, always eating around the fat; but Mary's dish opened the portal to my enjoyment of comfort food. There is no more perfect dish in the world than Mary's chicken and dumplings. I start making them as soon as the weather gets cool and I don't stop until the tomatoes in our garden start coming in. I will always remember staring into that pot of gold that Mary brought to that yellow kitchen I grew up in. Mary died a few years back, but I think of her every time I make this dish. What a delicious way for someone's memory to live on. Thank you, Mary.

COOKING
À LA Lala



CHICKEN AND DUMPLINGS À LA LALA

For the soup:

3-4 stalks of celery sliced
3-4 carrots sliced
6 T. butter or schmaltz

8 T. all purpose flour
1 t. dried thyme
2T. Sherry or vermouth
1 cup frozen peas, thawed

8-10 cups chicken stock (see recipe from episode 1)
2-4 cups shredded or chopped chicken

For the dumplings:

2 cups all purpose flour
1 T. Baking powder

1 t. salt
3T. butter or schmaltz
1 cup milk

1/2 cup minced herbs (chives, dill and parsley are nice) optional

Steam the carrots and celery in a steamer basket or colander set over a pot with a couple of inches of water for about 5 minutes or until just tender. Put these aside until the soup base is made.

For the soup:

Now, heat your butter or schmaltz in a very large pot on medium high heat. Add the flour and thyme and stir or whisk until you have a nice golden color. Don't let it get brown. Next, add the sherry or vermouth, stirring and then add chicken stock, 4 cups at a time. Continue stirring so that the stock incorporates into the roux and the soup begins to thicken. You might want to use 8 cups or even 10 if you have that much. When you have added all the stock into the pot, add the steamed vegetable and chicken. Keep the soup on a low simmer while you make the dumplings.

For the dumplings:

Heat the milk and butter in a small saucepan until it comes to a simmer. Mix the flour, baking powder and salt in a big bowl. Add the hot liquid to the dry ingredients and stir until combined, then add the herbs if using and fold them in until you have a smooth dough. Put the dough on a floured work surface. Here, you can either roll the dough into little 1" balls, or roll it out with a rolling pin to a thickness of 1/2 inch. Then, cut into ribbons that are then cut into 2"-3" pieces or use a round cutter to make round dumplings.

Turn the heat up on the soup so that it comes to a simmer and lay the dumplings onto the soup, submerging so that they are covered. Do this until all of the dumplings are in the pot. Try not to move too quickly or the dumplings may stick together.

Let the dumplings cook in the simmering soup for about 15 minutes. If you have made little balls, these might take 5-10 minutes longer to cook through. Now, season with salt and pepper and taste the soup to see if it is seasoned to your liking.

I like to serve with some of the herbs I used in the dumplings if there are any left. Enjoy!

GOUGÈRES

I don't know when I first discovered Gougères. I know it was in my single days. Maybe I used them, as bait; I can't remember. They are delectable, airy treats that aren't that difficult to make and you probably have all the necessary ingredients in your kitchen right now: water, butter, salt, flour and cheese for starters. This is a classic pate a choux; the same recipe base you use for cream puffs and eclairs. Gougères steer off in the savory direction by adding cheese, herbs or spices. If you fancy a little heat, throw in a pinch of cayenne. Prefer some primal fire, get out the smoked paprika. I think everything is better with chives, but you may love thyme, dill or tarragon. Gruyere is a terrific choice for your cheese; it has a nuttiness that is wonderful and it grates nicely, but any hard, salty cheese will do. Even that sharp cheddar you probably have in the fridge.

I like to do the whole thing by hand, stirring with a wooden spoon from start to finish. But if you prefer to move the dough to a mixer before adding in your eggs, why not? Your gougères may puff up more or less depending on a variety of factors: your oven, the humidity or maybe your having a bad hair day. No matter, they are a lovely treats you'll have fun making and an even better time polishing them off!

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GOUGÈRES À LA LALA

1 cup water

4 T. butter

1/2 t. salt

Heavy pinch of cayenne

(or any dried spice you

like: nutmeg, smoked paprika...)

4 eggs, room temp

5 oz. grated Gruyere, or any hard, salty cheese

1/3 c. minced chives or

fresh thyme—whatever you fancy

1/2 c. grated parmesan

Preheat oven to 450.

Line a baking sheet with parchment or a Silpat .

Melt the butter in the water in a medium saucepan. Add the salt and whatever spice you choose. Then, add the flour all at once and stir with a wooden spoon. Stir this for a few minutes to get all the flour blended in and to cook as much liquid out as you can before adding the eggs, one by one. You can either add the eggs directly into the saucepan you started in, or move the dough to another bowl for mixing or even a stand mixer. Make sure each egg is fully incorporated before adding the next.

When the eggs are incorporated, add your cheese and chopped herbs if using.

Now you are ready to shape them and put them on the prepared baking sheet. You can shape them a number of ways: use a small ice cream scoop, a pastry bag or ziplock bag with a small cut in the corner, or just use two spoons to make your little balls. I like to make the the size of a ping pong ball. Then sprinkle the grated Parmesan over the formed balls to give them a nice salty crust.

Bake at 450 for about 20 minutes or until your gougères are puffed and golden. Serve them immediately and bask in the compliments!

BLENDING BUTTERS

Oh, Butter. What is it with me and the great Fats of the world? I love you, Schmaltz, but I have room in my heart and belly for butter, too. Of course, butter on its own is delicious, but when it hooks up with another sexy ingredient—or more—it can be sublime.

A classic couple is sliced radishes on buttered baguette sprinkled with salt. This is a lovely treat; creamy richness meets peppery crunch. But it's even better when chives crash the party. Soften your butter, grate your radishes and mince your chives and you have an easy and elegant spread for toasted slices of baguette or the dependable Saltine.

Consider your favorite herbs, spices and cheese fair game for this mating dance. You won't taste anything more blissful than Blue cheese chive butter on a nice grilled steak. I'll stop there. I'm getting aroused...

COOKING
À LA *Lala*



RADISH CHIVE BUTTER À LA LALA

- 1 stick of unsalted butter, softened
- 3 T. Grated radishes
- 2 T. Minced chives
- Maldon salt

Blend the first three ingredients together with a fork and serve with the salt alongside. If you add the salt directly to the blended butter, the radishes will start sweating and it won't be as visually appealing. (But it will taste just as good!)