

The Potato, Food with a Cause

In this article, I would like to talk about an ingredient that originally came from Latin America and that represents one of the most important foods in the world after wheat, corn and rice. I am referring to the potato.

Traces of potato were found from 8,000 years ago next to Lake Titicaca in South America, in the Andes at the border of Bolivia and Peru. These traces were found 3,800 meters above sea level, which is the perfect altitude for growing potatoes. There are approximately 200 species of wild potatoes. Of the 5,000 varieties that exist, 3,000 of them can be found in Peru.

The Incas put a lot of importance on corn, but they also adopted the potato to ensure that their empire would have enough food. Potatoes were cultivated in small terraces, where the people also made botanical experiments and produced enormous amounts from small parcels of land.

The potato that was harvested near Lake Titicaca was called “Mother Jatha,” or the mother of growth. That is very symbolic for me and beautiful that the main foods of some cultures are given the name of the “mother that gives growth” as in this case, giving to the mothers the role of those who give the life to help their country grow.

The expansion of the potato to the world came much later. When the Spanish colonization began, they took the potato to Spain in 1570. It came to England in 1586 and to Holland in 1610. It is said that, in 1613 in France, the potato was considered awful until the king tasted it and asked that it be cultivated. In 1618, the Thirty Years’ War broke out, and the potato was the food that kept people alive. During times of famine, the potato was found to have a great value for the people. In the beginning, the European aristocracy enjoyed the flowers of the potato but thought the potato was only good for the pigs.

The potato spread throughout the world when people gave the potato to others in different

parts of the world. Potatoes were thought to be poisonous in the beginning, and the first people who appreciated it were the Marines who found the potato easy to transport. The potato then found its way to different countries, such as China, India and Japan. It didn’t spread that easily in the northern hemisphere because of the climate.

There is a very well known dish in Peru called Causa Peruana, which is made from potatoes and has a very beautiful story.

During the time of war with Chile, the women attempted to find a way to help the soldiers who were valiantly fighting for Peru. They voluntarily gathered what the people could give them such as corn, carrots and potatoes. With their ingredients, they invented a dish that they could sell to help the cause (causa in Spanish). They cooked the potato, mashed it and seasoned it with aji, lime and oil and made a homogenized dough that they filled with different ingredients. Then when the women sold this dish, they offered it by saying, “For the cause! For the cause!” (Por la causa, por la cuasa). This is how the dish was born (Causa Peruana), which today is one of the most exquisite dishes from one of the most important, varied, complex and delicious gastronomies in the world.

The Peruvian causa can be filled with chicken, vegetables, crab, etc.

Ingredients

- 2 lbs. of boiled white potato
- 1 lb. of boiled yellow potato
- ½ diced onion marinated with salt, lime and oil
- 1/3 cup of oil
- 2 tsps. Of yellow aji blended with some seeds
- ¾ tbs. of lime juice
- Salt and pepper
- 10 olives
- 3 hard boiled eggs

After boiling the potatoes, mash them to make a purée, being sure there are no lumps. Once the purée is made, add the oil and mix until the potatoes become soft and manageable. Add the lime, salt, pepper and yellow aji. Mix a little bit more. Once the dough is compact and manageable, make a figure, either circular or square. Roll out the dough with a rolling pin on a table to the thickness that you want. Cut out figures with a cutter or a glass. Put the cut piece on a plate, and put a piece of cooked egg, olives, seasoned marinated onion and then put another piece of the potato dough on top. This is the easiest way to make them. You can also fill them with chicken or tuna salad or with avocado, etc. ♦

