

Donald's Pâté Chinois / Shepherd's Pie

In Canada, shepherd's pie contains beef; one folk story is that during the construction of the railroads, the Chinese cooks were asked to make Shepherd's Pie or Cottage Pie for the workers, and were instructed to make the dish using minced beef, cream style corn (for the sauce), and potatoes. The French Canadian workers liked the dish so much that they brought the recipe back home and called it Pâté Chinois (Chinese Pie, after the Chinese cooks who made it for them ...)

I add the ketchup, carrots and peas because I like carrots and peas a lot, and the ketchup in the beef layer is rather nice, or at least I think so.

Makes five, 6"x8"x2" dishes and ten, 4" diameter x 2" deep ramekins -- for freezing, of course

Notes to help prepare in advance:

- peel and quarter (but do not cook) the potatoes a day or two before and keep in water and in a fridge to help save time in making the dishes on cooking day
- trim and chop (but do not cook) the carrots and onions a day or two before and keep in a fridge to help save time in making the dishes on cooking day

Equipment:

- Vegetable peeler
- Cutting board
- Kitchen knife
- Large pot (at least 4 quarts -- potatoes)
- Stove
- Large spoon for the dollop of margarine
- Measuring cup
- Potato masher
- Spatula / icing knife to spread mashed potatoes on the pies
- Food processor with slicing tool (optional)
- Medium pot (for boiling carrots)
- Large skillet or electric frypan
- Measuring spoons
- Spatula (cooking beef)
- Ovenproof casserole dishes equivalent to above. Microwave safe dishes help cut down on the warming up and browning part when cooking
- Freezer bags appropriate to number of dishes produced and dish sizes
- Permanent marker to identify freezer bags

Topping:

- 10 lbs (4 kg) potatoes
- 1.5 cups milk for mashed potatoes
- 2 large dollops of margarine
- 2 tsp of salt

Filling:

- 4 lbs (1,8kg) ground beef

- 5 medium onions (approximately 1-3/4 lbs, 800g)
- Salt to taste
- Ketchup to taste (about 1/2 cup to 1 cup)
- 6 medium carrots
- 7 to 8 x 14oz / 398ml cans cream style corn -- refrigerate in advance (to help cool the pies)
- 1/2 cup frozen peas

To make the shepherd's pies:

- Peel and quarter potatoes, and rinse in cold water
- Cover potatoes with clean water
- Add 1 tsp salt to potatoes
- Bring potatoes to a boil
- Boil potatoes for twenty (20) minutes
- This step will occur while the beef mixture is still frying: After the twenty minutes, immediately drain the potatoes
- Immediately drain potatoes; add milk, margarine and one teaspoon salt to taste
- Mash potatoes until smooth
- Cover mashed potatoes and put aside

While the potatoes are boiling:

- Clean and trim carrots
- Slice carrots into coins, optionally in a food processor with a slicing tool
- Cover carrots with water
- Salt water, and bring carrots to a boil
- Boil carrots for five (5) minutes
- Drain carrots
- Allow carrots to cool, such as in a refrigerator

While the potatoes and carrots are boiling:

- Clean and trim onions
- Chop onions coarsely
- Place chopped onions in a large skillet, such as an electric frypan
- Place ground beef in skillet with the onions
- Fry the ground beef and onions, adding salt to taste, and breaking up the ground beef pieces while blending with the onions
- Partway through cooking, add ketchup to the frying ingredients
- Ground beef is cooked when the water fraction has evaporated (there will still be liquid grease left) and ingredients begin to caramelize on the bottom of the skillet

Building the dishes:

- Layer the beef and onion mix in the bottoms of all of the casserole dishes
- Cover the beef and onion mix with the cream style corn
- Sprinkle the frozen peas on top of the cream style corn
- Layer the carrot coins on top of the peas and cream style corn
 - Alternatively, the cream corn, peas and carrots can be mixed together in advance, and layered onto the beef
- Layer the still warm mashed potatoes on top of the carrots, peas, and cream style corn layer

Freezing

- Put the casseroles in freezer bags and freeze. I find that freezing first helps "marry" the ingredients better for later when being cooked.

Cooking and serving

- Defrost fully -- if microwave safe dishes were used, using the microwave to defrost and preheat the dish helps
- Bake at 350F for approximately 30 minutes if heated in microwave beforehand, or about 60 minutes if not
- Continue baking until potato layer begins to brown and a bit of sauce begins to bubble up the sides
- If desired, broil for several minutes to brown the potato layer.