

## Potato Soup Makes A Filling Meal

Many Irish dishes focus on simple, fresh ingredients that can be purchased close to home. Potatoes long have been a staple of Irish cooking. Brought to Europe by Spanish explorers from the New World, the potato put an end to famine in regions of northern Europe, like Ireland. Smithsonian notes that, by the end of the 18th century, roughly 40 percent of the Irish ate no solid food other than potatoes. If that sounds like a boring diet, it's good to note that all that was necessary to make potatoes desirable and more versatile was a little creativity.

Potato soup is one way to experiment with potatoes. There are many different takes on potato soup, but most classic Irish recipes feature potatoes, stock, leeks, and onions. But that does not mean potato soup can't be enhanced by other ingredients, like those found in this recipe for "Potato, Escarole and Country Ham Soup" from "The Culinary Institute of America Book of Soups" (Lebhar-Friedman Books).

### Potato, Escarole & Country Ham Soup

Makes 8 servings

1 tablespoon unsalted butter

1 onion, diced (about 1 1/4 cups)

1 leek, white and light green parts minced (about 1 1/4 cups)

1 celery stalk, diced (about 1/2 cup)

1 garlic clove, minced (about 1/2 teaspoon)

1 quart chicken broth

2 yellow or white potatoes, peeled and diced (about 2 cups)

1 sprig fresh or 1/2 teaspoon dried thyme

2 cups chopped escarole (about 8 ounces)

1 cup diced country ham



1/4 teaspoon salt, or to taste

1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, or to taste

Heat the butter in a soup pot over low heat. Add the onion, leek, celery, and garlic; stir until they are evenly coated. Cover the pot and cook until the vegetables are tender and translucent, 6 to 8 minutes.

Add the broth, potatoes and thyme. Simmer the soup until the potatoes are tender enough to mash easily, about 20 minutes.

Remove the thyme and discard. Puree the soup. Return the soup to the pot and bring to a simmer.

Add the escarole and diced ham and simmer, 12 to 15 minutes, or until all the ingredients are tender.

Season with salt and pepper. Serve the soup in heated bowls.

Tip: Country hams have an altogether different taste and texture from that of boiled hams. They have been cured for lengthy periods and have a unique salty, smoky taste. Ask your deli manager or butcher to help you find country ham or a suitable substitute.

## How To Reduce Risk Of Home Fires This Winter Season

Safety might not be the first thing people think of as the holiday season approaches. Faith, celebrations, decorations, and holiday dinners all come to mind when considering the holiday season. But that doesn't mean safety should be left out of holiday planning.

Fire safety bears special consideration during the holiday season, when the prevalence of fire hazards like Christmas trees, holiday lighting displays and other decorative items increase the risk for home fires. Such tragedies can be averted with a few simple safety measures.

- Tend to your tree. Live Christmas trees are awe-inspiring, but they also pose a significant fire risk. The National Fire Protection Association urges celebrants to purchase only healthy trees with fresh, green needles that do not fall off when touched. Such trees are less likely to dry out, especially when well-watered throughout the season. Dry trees can catch fire more easily than healthy trees if embers from nearby fireplaces or candles drift in their direction.

- Recognize that location matters when decorating. The NFPA notes that Christmas trees should always be placed at least three feet away from any heat source, including fireplaces, space heaters, heat vents, candles, and even overhead lights. If decorating with candles, never place them on the tree or on tables where other flammable decorations have already been placed. Chanukah menorahs should never be placed near curtains or other decorations.

- Turn off all lights and extinguish all lit



decorative items when leaving the home or going to bed. Lit candles and menorahs should never be left unattended. The NFPA recommends turning tree lights and exterior decorative lights off when leaving the home or going to bed.

- Utilize a fire screen on fireplaces. Embers can catch on trees, decorations or anything else that's flammable if they escape the fireplace. Fire screens prevent that from happening by ensuring embers from burning logs stay in the fireplace. Like candles and menorahs, fires burning in a fireplace should never be left unattended. Make sure all embers have been extinguished before leaving the home or going to bed.

- Keep discarded trees away from your home. A 2014 analysis from the NFPA found that none of the ten days with the largest share of Christmas tree fires were before Christmas. Dried out trees still pose a fire risk even after they've been removed from a home. When discarding a tree at the end of the holiday season, place it at the curb or keep it a safe distance away from your home and garage until you can.

Fire safety measures are an important component of the holiday season that can prevent this joyous time of year from turning tragic.