

SAUSAGE AND POTATO STEW

Now that the cooler and wetter weather has come, I like to make an easy one-pot dish of sausages and potatoes for supper. You can use just one kind of sausages, but I like to mix different types. Take a pound of Italian sausages, (I like a mixture of sweet and hot), a pound of knockwurst, and about 3 bratwurst, about half a pound. Or you can substitute kielbasa for the knockwurst. You'll need about six small onions, about a pound, peeled, 2 pounds small potatoes, peeled, (I like Yukon Gold for this), and 6-8 cloves of garlic, unpeeled. As you can see, these quantities are not precise.

Place the Italian sausages (or any other uncooked sausages you're using) and about 1/3 cup of water in a large pot so that they're in one layer. Cook, slowly, on medium heat. The water will evaporate after a few minutes but will help the sausages to release their fat. After the water's evaporated and the sausages have started to brown, add the knockwurst and the bratwurst to brown. Turn the sausages often to make sure they're browned on all sides. After about 10 to 12 minutes, the sausages should be browned, so remove them to a plate and set it aside.

Add enough oil to the pan to make about 1/3 of a cup of oil and fat total, and add the onions and potatoes and brown them on medium-low heat for about 20 minutes, stirring often. You don't want them to brown too quickly, so that they have a chance to cook all the way through. (Or you can give the potatoes and onions a head start in the microwave so they'll brown more quickly and still be cooked all the way through.) Then add the garlic cloves and the sausages and cook, covered, on very low heat for another 20 minutes. Taste for seasoning and add salt if needed. Garnish with some chopped fresh parsley, if you have some, and serve. This will serve four, with a salad and some good French or Italian bread.

I like to serve the potatoes and sausages with a little bit of their natural juices, some robust mustard like the Sonoma hot-sweet mustard, and a strongly flavored green salad, like this next recipe, for an escarole salad with a garlic-mustard dressing.

Take a large head of escarole, split it in half, and cut into 2-inch pieces. Wash the escarole pieces thoroughly and dry in a salad spinner. You should have between 8 to 9 cups of washed escarole.

Mix together 2 teaspoons of Dijon-style mustard with 2 small or one large clove of garlic, peeled, crushed and chopped very fine, (about 1 teaspoon), plus ¼ teaspoon each of salt and freshly ground black pepper, 2 teaspoons of wine vinegar, and 1/3 cup vegetable oil. Don't worry about getting it perfectly blended. About five minutes before serving, toss the escarole with the vinaigrette.

Being a fan of quick and easy fruit desserts, here's one that goes well with this dinner. Take a ripe melon and cut it into chunks, or if you have a melon-baller, into balls. I like to use a mixture of honeydew and cantaloupe, or those Tuscan melons currently on sale in the supermarket. You want about 4 cups of melon pieces, which you'll put into a large bowl. Peel a lime with a vegetable peeler, stack the slices, and cut them into thin strips. Add the strips of lime peel to the melon, along with the juice of the lime and about ¼ cup of honey and 1 tablespoon of dark rum, if you like. Mix well, and allow to sit for about an hour for the flavors to blend before serving. This also serves four, and can be accompanied by some thin crispy cookies.

This isn't a dinner for your best cabernet sauvignon. It would go well with a hearty full-flavored beer or ale, like a home brew. Or if you prefer wine, try a full-flavored red wine, like a petit syrah or a robust zinfandel. And there you have a delicious autumn dinner. This is Steve Muni for the Hometown Kitchen.