



We both grew up in Irish-Catholic families [Mike in Brooklyn, Christina in the Bronx]. Over the past few years we have become convinced that we actually grew up in the same family. Like, both of our clans would get their Christmas trees on the 23rd, about a week later than everyone else in the building. And everything Christina's parents used to say, Mike's parents used to say. For example: "Spill that milk and I'll spill your blood," "Mother of God" and "If you show me the tree with the money on it, you can go on the ski trip." Most important, each night we would eat some kind of dead animal flesh cooked until it (or we) screamed stop, buttered canned vegetables boiled to kill all the botulism (and nutritional value), and the piece de résistance, mashed potatoes. They were so much a part of our lives back then that we weren't properly appreciative of their excellence, but now that we're grown-ups we really miss them. Especially when we're sick or in need of a solid meal. We're telling you how to prepare them because the only good mashed potatoes are homemade (restaurants usually serve that instant powdered crap) and because we care about your future. So forget about writing up a killer resumé; cooking mashed potatoes is the skill you're gonna need to survive in the real world. It's a jungle out there.



The recipe:

Take 1½ good-sized potatoes per person (a nutritionist would probably tell you to eat one each, but this is not about moderation; the point of mashed potatoes is to indulge yourself). Peel and cut into quarters. After you've boiled them slowly for a good 20 minutes, drain, and while still in the pot, give them a good, thorough mashing. (A word about the masher: It must be the grid kind, like on this page, not the WASP-y, squiggly-line model that housewares stores try and pass off on you. Strictly for neophytes, man. Christina had a hard time finding the mighty grid masher, and Mike was the only person on staff who

mashed potatoes rule, God love 'em

could sympathize.) Add a good hunk of butter (not margarine, for crying out loud!) and ample salt and pepper. Chuck in some whole milk (what are you crazy with that skim?!) till the spuds attain that not-too-stiff-not-too-runny consistency, and you're done. If you're one of those people who doesn't mind when all the foods on your plate are touching each other, you have our permission to chew your mashed potatoes and peas together, stick out your tongue and show your brother.

WARNING! Don't make the unforgivable breach of Irish-Catholic working-class etiquette by serving mashed potatoes on March 17. That is the day for just boiled potatoes, served with cabbage and corned beef. "It's just the way it is," said Mrs. Flaherty and Mrs. Kelly. "Now sit down and eat before I knock that smile off your face."

