

Christophene au Gratin

4 Christophenes (Chayotes)	2 teaspoons fresh thyme
3 tablespoons butter	½ teaspoon nutmeg
⅓ cup minced shallots	Tabasco to taste
2 tablespoons flour	Salt and pepper to taste
½ cup milk	½ pound Gruyere
1 minced jalapeño pepper	¼ cup soft fresh bread crumbs
3 tablespoons minced parsley	

Cut each christophene in half lengthwise. Discard the seeds. Steam or boil the christophenes in salted water for about 30 minutes or until the flesh is very tender. Refresh under cold water and drain.

Scrape out the flesh with a spoon, being careful not to cut through the skin. You should have about ¼-inch thick skins remaining. Drain the flesh in a colander, pressing to exude as much excess water as possible. Purée in a food processor.

Melt the butter in a skillet. Add the shallots and the jalapeño, and cook until the shallots are very lightly browned and the jalapeño is tender.

Stir in the flour, and cook for a couple minutes. Whisk in the milk, and continue cooking until the mixture is thickened.

Add the parsley, thyme, nutmeg, Tabasco, salt and pepper to taste. Stir in the christophene purée, and taste again for seasoning.

Butter a baking dish. Coarsely grate the Gruyere. Spoon the christophene mixture into the shells. Generally, 4 christophenes yield enough mixture to fill only 6 half-shells. Top each with the Gruyere and soft bread crumbs. (Panko may be substituted for the fresh bread crumbs.) May be made ahead to this point and refrigerated.

Preheat the oven to 400°. Bake in the upper third of the oven for about 15 minutes, or until top is nicely browned.