

Creamy Scalloped Potatoes With Ham

3½ pounds russet potatoes
4 cups whole milk
1 bay leaf
½ teaspoon salt
1 garlic clove
4 tablespoons unsalted butter

3 tablespoons flour
½ cup heavy cream
Salt and pepper to taste
¾ pound chunk smoked ham
½ pound grated Swiss cheese
¼ cup grated Parmigiano

Place a rack in the middle level of the oven and preheat it to 350°.

Peel and slice the potatoes about ⅜-inch thick. This is best done on a mandoline. Place the slices in a large kettle with 4 cups of whole milk, the bay leaf, and the salt. Rub a large baking dish or a 9-13-inch baking pan with the garlic clove. Then place that garlic in the pot with the potatoes and milk.

Bring the pot slowly to the simmer. When it has come to the simmer, continue to cook gently for about 4-5 minutes until the potatoes are just barely tender, but not fully cooked. Discard the bay leaf and the garlic clove. Carefully remove the potatoes with a slotted spoon to a bowl, leaving behind in the kettle about 2½ cups of milk.

In another saucepan, melt the butter. When it is fully melted, whisk in the 3 tablespoons of flour, and cook and whisk it for a 2-3 minutes without allowing it to brown. Whisk in the warm milk in which the potatoes were cooked. Continue whisking until the sauce thickens. Then whisk in the heavy cream. Finally, off the heat, whisk in about ½ cup of the grated Swiss cheese, and continue whisking until the cheese is melted. This is called a Mornay sauce.

Cut the ham into about ¼-inch-thick slices.

Place a layer of potatoes in the baking dish. Season generously with salt and pepper. Layer ⅓ of the ham slices over the potatoes. Sprinkle ⅓ of the remaining Swiss cheese over the potatoes. Then continue making two more layers of potatoes, salt and pepper, ham slices, and Swiss cheese.

Pour the warm Mornay sauce over the 3 layers of potatoes. Even off the top with a spatula, and sprinkle it with the ¼ cup of grated Pamigiano.

Bake in the preheated oven for about 1 hour or until the potatoes are fully cooked and the top is golden brown. Allow the dish to rest for about 10 minutes before serving.