

Crispy Smashed Potatoes with Baked Feta & Zhoug

New season potatoes and coriander are both abundant in my garden in spring, but you could make this in autumn too when the second flush of coriander comes on with the main crop of potatoes, just make sure you choose smaller roasting spuds - if they are large just cut them in half before cooking.

Serves 4 - 6

Ingredients

- 1.2 kilograms small gourmet or new potatoes
- 4-5 tablespoons mild oil such as rice bran oil
- 200 gram block feta
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- ½ teaspoon chili flakes
- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- Zhoug – see recipe below
- Optional: 1 – 2 baby fennel bulbs, thinly sliced

For the zhoug

- 1 teaspoon cumin seeds
- 6 cloves garlic, skinned
- ½ teaspoon dried chili flakes (*for a spicier sauce use 1 teaspoon*)
- 4 packed cups fresh coriander leaves and young thin stems, roughly chopped
- ½ teaspoon sea salt
- Juice from 1 lemon
- ¼ cup extra virgin olive oil
- Optional: pinch of ground cardamom

Method

1. Wash the potatoes and place them into a large pot filled with salted water. Bring to the boil and cook for 10 – 12 minutes, or until the potatoes are just cooked through – new potatoes don't take long, so ensure you don't overcook them or they will become mushy. While you are waiting for the potatoes, preheat your oven to 190.C or 180.C fanbake.
2. Drain the spuds into a colander and let them sit there for 5 minutes so the water can evaporate off them.
3. Pour the oil into an oven tray and add the potatoes along with a good sprinkle of sea salt and cracked black pepper, mixing with your fingers to coat them well. Using a potato masher, gently

push each potato down to flatten and squash them slightly and create rough pieces that will get crispy as they cook.

4. Bake for 25 minutes, or until the bottoms of the potatoes are brown and caramelised. Remove the tray from the oven.
5. Using tongs, turn each potato over and move them to make a space in the centre of the tray for the feta. Place the block of feta on the oven tray and pour the olive oil over it. Sprinkle the chili flakes and cumin seeds on top and place the tray back into the oven to cook for a further 20 minutes, or until the potatoes are crispy and the feta is caramelised on the bottom.
6. Make the zhoug while the potatoes and feta are cooking. Gently toast the cumin seeds in a dry frypan until they are aromatic. Place into a large mortar and pestle with the garlic and the chili flakes and give it all a good bash, breaking up the seeds well.
7. Gradually add the chopped coriander, pounding well between each addition. Add the salt with the last lot of coriander and blend well until a paste is formed.
8. Add the lemon juice, and while working the pestle in a circular motion drizzle the olive oil in very slowly until it has all been incorporated. You should be left with a gloriously green slightly textured emulsified sauce.
9. Taste and adjust any seasonings if needed, keeping in mind that the flavour will change and become more amplified if you let it rest for an hour or so.
10. If you want a bit more warmth to your zhoug add a small pinch of ground cardamom and stir it in.
11. Place everything onto a large serving platter with the potatoes around the outside and the feta in the middle, spooning some zhoug on top and placing the rest into a small bowl to serve on the side. Top with the finely sliced fennel if you are using – it adds colour and a nice texture to the dish.