

Pommes Anna with smoked salmon

I use Yukon Gold yellow potatoes or Russets (or a combination).

Ideally, use large potatoes.

The number of potatoes will depend on the size of the potatoes and the number of people you are serving.

For the four of us, I estimate 4-5 large potatoes

- * Slice them very thin (about 1/8 of an inch) with a mandoline (OXO and Zyliss make inexpensive models) or on the thinnest cut of your food processor vegetable slicer (you may have to cut the sides of your potato to get it into the feeder tube, but this enables you to shape the potato into a prettier, more circular version of itself)
- * Do not put the potatoes in water (something you would ordinarily do to prevent them from browning). Here, you want them to retain their starch since it helps them come together while cooking.
- * In a non-stick skillet (ideally, that will fit in your oven), melt at medium heat either clarified butter, ghee, or a combination of butter and olive oil. You want enough to generously coat the bottom of the pan. This will help the first layer of potatoes brown nicely. You can use a cast iron pan, but remember that you will be flipping it at the end, so it is better to opt for something lighter.
- * Starting in the middle, place a slice of potato and start making circles, with the slices lightly overlapping. Keep going in concentric circles until you reach the edges and start again. I usually lower the heat while doing this so I don't get burned.
- * Put a little salt and pepper after the first circle; I don't usually remember to do every circle, but once or twice is enough
- * You want 2-3 layers. You can have more, but then it takes longer to cook
- * Meanwhile, set your oven temperature to 400 degrees
- * Once you are done layering the potatoes, bring the heat back up to medium (if you lowered it while making the potato circles). Wait about 5 minutes for the potatoes to start cooking nicely, then cover them for about 10 minutes. You can also check it from time to time by using a spatula to look under the potatoes. You want the bottom layer to become golden. You can usually smell when that happens.
- * Put the skillet in the oven and cook it for about 20-25 minutes.

- * To test doneness, take it out and use a knife or toothpick to poke your potatoes. They should be completely soft. If not, return to the oven for additional time.

Once it is done, wait a little until it cools and then carefully flip the pan over a large plate. The potatoes should hold together. If they don't, it will still be delicious.

Once the potatoes are at room temperature, you can start covering them with a layer of smoked salmon. *Please note that you want your smoked salmon to be at room temperature*, so you don't have an unpleasant contrast between the buttery soft potatoes and a very cold top layer. I usually take the smoked salmon out of the refrigerator while the potatoes cool on the counter

You can put a thin layer of crème fraîche between the potatoes and the salmon, or serve it on the side for topping. Decorate the salmon with slices of lemon.

Serve with lemons and anything else you like (capers, chives, dill, etc)

Variations:

You can serve it just as it is, without smoked salmon (in fact, the classic Pommes Anna is just that). You can intersperse other root vegetable slices: celery root, sweet potatoes, etc. Just make sure they are sliced the same size.

Gratin

For potatoes, Yukon Gold yellow potatoes, which hold their shape nicely, Russet potatoes or a combination.

It is also wonderful with root vegetables: celery root, parsnips, turnips, sweet potatoes; you can combine them all.

For the 4 of us, I would use 4-5 large potatoes.

- * Heat oven to 350 degrees
- * Rub garlic along your gratin dish
- * Rub the gratin dish with a little butter
- * Cut the potatoes and whatever root vegetable you are using thin (1/4 to 1/8 inch; see above).
- * Don't put the potatoes in water, as you want them to retain all their starch
- * Start layering the gratin dish; 2 to 3 layers is best, so it can all cook uniformly

- * Remember to put a little salt and pepper over the layers (I usually do the first layer, forget to the second layer, and remember the third; it turns out fine)
- * Pour liquid (milk or cream or chicken broth) so it comes up to the sides, just below the surface
 - * You can do all milk, or mix half and half and milk, or do a mixture with cream; all will be delicious
 - * You can also warm your milk on the stove with a garlic glove, a bay leaf and some thyme branches; when it is warm, remove the thyme, bay leaf and garlic and pour it over the potatoes
 - * Or you can do all chicken broth, which is particularly good with root vegetables
 - * You can intersperse some fresh thyme/herbs in the layers
- *Put a few pieces of butter all over the top
- *Put in a 350 degree oven for about an hour; put the gratin over a baking sheet in case it spills over; if the top starts to burn, cover it with foil

The traditional Gratin Dauphinois does not have cheese, but you can put grated gruyere on it, or parmesan. It will give it a nice crust.

You can make it in a gratin dish, or in individual gratin dishes. This is particularly elegant if you are having a dinner party.

Most importantly: try it, don't worry if it isn't perfect, and please enjoy it, both the making and the savoring of it.