



DORY'S DIARY

DOROTHY SWART FLESHMAN

Plagued by the inability to throw things away

Occasionally in my teen and adult life I have gotten the notion of crocheting, knitting, or embroidery work. I love to start new projects. The problem is that over the years I end up with a lot of ambitious but uncompleted projects. And for some reason I never know what to do with the half-finished articles.

To complete an item — afghan, sweater, tablecloth, craft item, or any such piece that I had begun in the long ago — is seemingly impossible, for I can't recall just what it was that I had in mind at the time I started it.

Equally discouraging is the fact that I may have run out of the color yarn I was using, matching paint, paper, right-sized envelope, no longer in style, or even the reason for its being but I can't bear to discard the half-finished item. And so they collect in boxes, bags, baskets, and corners awaiting my final disposition of my partially begun creation.

Likewise, I have a problem disposing of anything that seems to have potential for a second, third, infinitum reason for life. If a box or container of any sort shows any sign of sturdiness, then surely it deserves another use before ending up in the garbage or recycle bin. Surely I must have been/am one of the original recyclers.

My folks always said, "Waste not, want not." I took it to heart. Even though we never had a great deal, what we had lasted a long time because we took care of it and then used it for any other purpose we could find for it.

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BETWEEN THE ROWS

WENDY SCHMIDT

Thoughts for summer flower gardening

The time has come to start spending time outdoors, and the weather is occasionally cooperating with plans to get fresh air and sunshine.

The clove currant and the gooseberries are in bloom, soon the flowering quince.

A couple of ideas:

- Perhaps the iris could use a little high phosphorus (big middle NPK number) fertilizer.
- Roses could use at least one tablespoon of Epsom salts each.

Small shade plants for color

In the category of perennials, remember that astilbe blooms extended periods of time, and there are dwarf astilbe varieties as well. Caladiums, Martagon lily, begonias, bergenia, bleeding heart, impatiens (also called sultanas or busy Lizzy), mimulus (monkey flower), nemophila (baby blue-eyes) coleus, sweet alyssum, digitalis, torenia (wishbone flower), nicotiana, myosotis (woodland forget-me-not), alstroemeria (Peruvian Lily), or salvia splendens "lavender love."

Alstroemeria is seldom used in flower beds here, but could even be placed in partial sun. It is a very long-lasting cut flower.

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A Challenging Recipe That's Worth Learning



Terrence Antonio James/Chicago-Tribune-TNS

Pommes dauphinoise is a decadent French dish featuring potatoes, heavy cream and cheese.

FRENCH DECADENCE

By James P. DeWan
Chicago Tribune

Remember the first time you performed brain surgery? Yikes, what a mess, right?

As it turns out, poking 'round the coconut's not unlike making pommes dauphinoise, that creamy, stratified casserole of potatoey French crazitude. Sure, they're both daunting, but, once you get the hang, you'll be the belle of the gustatory ball. Watch.

WHY YOU NEED TO LEARN THIS

Oh, sure. You didn't ask why you needed to learn brain surgery, but you're asking why you need to learn dauphinoise potatoes? Honestly, Madge, sometimes I just don't understand your priorities.

THE STEPS YOU TAKE

Here are some things about dauphinoise potatoes (aka au gratin or scalloped potatoes) and food in general: First, you've probably noticed that, whether it's our dreamy potato side dish or chocolate chip cookies or a steaming rack of Spam, the internet's fairly rotten with recipes. Nine bajillion and three, to be exact.

You've also noticed the multitudes of hyperbolic scribes promising breathlessly "the best" recipe, "the best" restaurant, "the best" whatever. Feh. I hate to break it to you, kids, but there is no best. Ever. And that's because of The One Absolute Truth in the Universe. You remember: There's no accounting for taste.

In other words, I can help you make a perfectly palatable dauphinoise potatoes, but, I can't predict how you'll like it, because, well, there's just no accounting for taste, is there?

Add to that the fact that anytime we go into the kitchen, the choice of ingredients, coupled with the method of preparation, can result in finished products as wildly different as consequentialism and deontology.

Our best (sic) option, then, is simply to give you the method for putting together a dauphinoise and then letting you take it from there. The components are simple: thinly sliced potatoes baked in a liquid dairy product with a little garlic, and maybe some cheese. Let's take a gander.

POTATOES

The world of potatoes exists on a spectrum between what we call "waxy" and "mealy" (aka "starchy"). Any potato will work, of course, because it's a potato. However, for dauphinoise, we like the starch because it thickens the sauce and inhibits curdling. Thus, the mighty russet, repository of starch galore, is the typical tater of choice.

Speaking of starch, usually we submerge cut potatoes in water to prevent browning. Not here, though, because soaking also dissolves starch and as we said, with dauphinoise, starch is our pal.

Peel and slice about 2 pounds of taters into 1/8-inch thick rounds. If you've got a mandoline, use it. Unless you possess the knife skills of an assassin, it's easier, faster and it produces more consistent cuts.

GARLIC

As much as I love garlic, it's easy to overdo. Thus, one clove, minced, is usually enough. Two, if you're in a high-density vampire neighborhood.

DAIRY

Normally, it's heavy cream, about 1 cup per pound of potatoes. If that's too rich, try half and half, or cut the cream with milk or stock. You could also use plain milk, or 2 percent, or even skim milk, if your goal is to have a body like Iggy Pop.

Now, low-fat dairy products curdle during cooking more easily than high-fat dairy products. Thus, if you're using milk, you

can decrease the likelihood of curdling by stirring in 2 tablespoons of potato starch dissolved in an ounce or two of water.

Whatever you're using, to further inhibit curdling, bring the whole megillah to a boil before baking: Combine the dairy, sliced potatoes and garlic in a saute pan or skillet, season it and set it over medium high heat.

CHEESE

A cheeseless dauphinoise never hurt anyone, but, I love Gruyere. Cheddar, mozzarella or anything melty will work, too. Shred roughly half a cup per pound of potatoes.

THE METHOD

Once its contents are all a-simmer, the skillet can go straight from the stovetop into the oven. If you're using cheese, scoop half your potatoes from the skillet into a greased baking dish. Sprinkle on half your cheese, cover with the remaining potatoes, then add the rest of the cheese and pour in the simmering dairy.

Bake the dauphinoise in a 350-degree oven for about 45 minutes to an hour, until the potatoes are tender as young love and golden brown as an amber wave of Kansas grain. If they're tender but still pale, crank the heat to 450 and bake another 5 to 10 minutes.

Finally, when the dauphinoise emerges triumphant from the oven, let it rest for 15 to 30 minutes before serving. Or, and this is what I like because I'm pfnancy with a silent "p," you can refrigerate it — up to several days — so it sets up nice and stiff, like the breeze off the Bosphorus.

To serve, use a knife or biscuit cutter to render it into individual portions of aesthetically pleasing geometric shapes, like a circle, rhombus or a heptadecagon.

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Getting ready to cultivate carrots

By Liz Douville
For WesCom News Service

With crossed fingers and bated breath, I await the repair of my irrigation pump. I am ready to plant my carrots and, like a kid, I want to do it now. The optimum soil temperature for carrot seed germination is between 45 degrees and 85 degrees. My soil temperature is at 60 degrees. At that temperature germination, it should take place in 10 days. When the soil temperature reaches 68 degrees, carrot seeds germinate in seven days. It pays to be patient. I am just anxious to again experience an aching back and broken fingernails.

Carrots are one of the most versatile root crops to include in your garden.



Barb Gonzalez / WesCom News Service

See *Carrots* / Page 2B Carrots are a versatile and healthy crop.