

Eggs and potatoes: Perfect fare

By JeanMarie Brownson
Chicago Tribune

Goodness doesn't get much simpler than eggs and potatoes. The combination works for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Think scrambled eggs with potatoes, potato salad laced with hard-cooked eggs, crunchy fried rice topped with a soft egg. It's perfect fare for casual entertaining, great for overnight guests during the overloaded holiday season.

I think the contrasting textures explain a lot of the combo's appeal. Also, both ingredients exhibit a fantastic affinity for picking up other flavors — butter, oil, bacon, hot sauce, black pepper.

Loving this combination, I seek it out whenever possible. On a recent trip to Kalamazoo, Michigan, I thrilled to see corned beef hash on the breakfast menu at Anna's House. The skillet full of crispy little potatoes and shreds of tender, rich corned beef, topped with a fried egg, proved a far cry from any canned corned beef hash of old.

The secret to this rejuvenated breakfast staple is allowing the ingredients to maintain individual textures: crispy potatoes, soft caramelized onions, toothsome meat chunks and the melting goodness of soft egg.

For just about any hash, I prefer to par-cook small potatoes to shorten the cook time and to retain moisture. The microwave cooks the potatoes quickly and makes cleanup easy. For crispness, pull out the cast-iron pan and heat it thoroughly before adding some fat to lubricate everything and promote browning. Start with a sweet onion to caramelize it, then



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Goodness doesn't get much simpler than eggs and potatoes, as demonstrated by this homey corned beef hash.

add the par-cooked potatoes in a single, uncrowded layer — leaving space around the potatoes promotes the browning.

Once the potatoes and onions are perfectly golden, you can go in a million directions.

The breakfast skillet that follows is delicious topped with softly poached eggs that add yolky richness.

For the corned beef, I simmer a small roast in water with spices on the stovetop until it is fall-apart tender. Use the slow cooker, if desired, so you can run errands while the meat cooks.

Serve this skillet of goodness at any time of the day.

BREAKFAST SKILLET CORNED BEEF HASH AND EGGS

Prep: 30 minutes
Cook: 3 hours
Serves: 6 to 8

Poached eggs are great

here too; eliminate the 1 tablespoon oil used to fry the eggs. See the note below.

- 1 uncooked corned beef brisket, about 3 pounds
- 3 or 4 bay leaves
- 1 teaspoon each: whole black peppercorns, coriander seed (or dill seed)
- ½ teaspoon celery seed or leafy tops from several celery ribs
- 1½ pounds (small to medium) red, yellow and blue potatoes, scrubbed
- 4 tablespoons safflower, sunflower or expeller-pressed canola oil for high heat cooking
- 1 large or 2 medium (10 ounces total) sweet onion(s), halved, cut into thin slices
- ½ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- ¼ teaspoon each dried leaf thyme and basil
- 6 to 8 eggs
- 2 cups baby arugula leaves, optional
- Handful chopped fresh chives or green onion tops
- Vinegry hot red pepper sauce, to taste

1. Put corned beef into a deep, large saucepan. Add cold water to cover meat by 1 inch. Add bay leaves, peppercorns, coriander seed and celery seed. Heat to a boil;

reduce heat to very low, and cover. Simmer, turning meat occasionally, until a fork inserted comes out easily, about 3 hours. Add more water as need to keep meat submerged. Let cool in the liquid. Transfer meat to container and add about 1 cup of the cooking liquid. Refrigerate, covered, up to several days. (I save the remaining flavorful cooking water for simmering vegetables such as carrots, cabbage and turnips for another meal.)

2. Meanwhile, cut potatoes crosswise in half. Cut each half into ½-inch wide wedges. Place in a large microwave-safe bowl, and add 1 cup water. Cover tightly. Microwave on high (100 percent power), stirring once, until fork-tender, about 6 minutes. Drain.

3. Remove beef from the cooking liquid, and pull enough of the meat into large bite-size shreds to yield about 4 cups.

4. Heat oven to 375 degrees on convection or 400 degrees conventional. Heat two large, ovenproof skillets (preferably cast-iron) over medium heat until hot. To each pan, add 1½ tablespoons of the oil and half of the onion. Cook and stir until onion is golden, about 4 minutes. Stir half of

the drained potatoes into each pan. Cook and stir until golden, about 4 minutes. Season each pan with pepper, thyme and basil.

5. Stir half the shredded corned beef into each pan. Cook and stir to heat meat through, about 2 minutes. Stir ½ cup of the reserved meat cooking liquid into each pan. Set in the oven to heat through, about 10 minutes.

6. Meanwhile, heat a large nonstick skillet over medium heat until a drop of water

sizzles on contact. Add remaining 1 tablespoon oil and crack in the eggs. Reduce heat to low, cover the skillet, and cook 3 minutes. Uncover and continue cooking until yolks are slightly set, about 1 minute more. Gently release the eggs from the skillet with a spatula.

7. Remove the corned beef mixture from the oven. Sprinkle with the arugula, if using, then top with the fried eggs. Sprinkle with chives. Serve right away. Pass the hot sauce.



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BIRDS

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geese, Canada geese, evening grossbeak, purple finch, rosy finch, goldfinch, junco and snowy owl. Some of these you may never see as their migratory path doesn't bring them here every year. Others are common.

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