



# A Question of Taste

By Hilary Keating Callaghan

## Misgivings about potato salad? Try Caponata

I find myself at a loss to explain the tremendous popularity of potato salad as a picnic food.

Before I incite hordes of potato salad fans, I should emphasize that I am not questioning the intrinsic worth of potato salad — just its practicality as a picnic food. At this time of year, especially, we are threatened by home economists, extension centers and public health officials who warn of the dire consequences of allowing protein-containing foods to remain at room temperature for any but the briefest time.

Hot dogs, hamburgers, fish, quiche — whatever entree is to be featured at a picnic — must be handled with the greatest caution, kept very cold until cooked or eaten. It seems perverse to accompany the entree with a salad which demands an equal degree of care. Most people's definition of potato salad includes mayonnaise (which contains egg) and sliced, hard-cooked eggs — a double threat.

Although I have never yet poisoned anyone (that I am aware of), I always take potato salad to a picnic with misgivings. Transported there in a cooler,

it should arrive in safe form. After an hour or so basking in the sun, however, its benign condition is open to question.

At this point, should it be whisked back into the cooler to serve another day? This is probably a moot point since any ice in the cooler is usually gone by this point. Unfortunately, there is no tell-tale odor or discoloration to help decide whether to dump the remainder or eat some and keep an eagle eye out for any symptoms of gastric distress (a procedure guaranteed to produce those symptoms).

**HOW MUCH** easier to save the potato salad for a meal at home, close to the refrigerator, and tote a salad minus the eggs.

A delicious salad can be made using summer's tiny new potatoes marinated in a vinegar and oil dressing. In fact, almost any vegetables — green peppers, celery, green beans, carrots, peas — can make a tasty, colorful summer salad.

Since the celery raw for a crunchy texture, and the peppers and steam the remaining vegetables so that they

will absorb the flavors of the vinaigrette. Although best served cold, this type of salad is at least safe to eat if it does reach room temperature.

A characteristically Italian version of the marinated vegetable salad is caponata, a blend of eggplant, onions, tomatoes, celery, and black olives, cooked in olive oil, splashed with vinegar and chilled to be served as either a salad or relish.

The version I have served and include here is taken from "The Great Sandwich Book" by Anita Borghese. It was included in her book because it is such a perfect accompaniment to any non-sweet sandwich, including such picnic favorites as hot dogs and hamburgers.

Although it might not satisfy a dyed-in-the-wool potato salad lover, it might be a welcome addition to the salads for anyone who has already been to a few picnics this summer and had his fill of potato salad and beans.

**YOU MIGHT** try to sneak it in the next time everyone brings a dish to pass at an outdoor gathering.

The chips, relishes, baked beans, potato salads and brownies are sure to be there for traditionalists. The caponata can serve as a pleasant alternative for the more adventurous.

The recipe makes a large batch (for

something with cold eggplant in it — everything is relative).

**CAPONATA**  
 1 1/2 lb. eggplant (baby eggplants are especially nice)  
 1 tsp. salt  
 3 tbs. celery  
 3 medium onions  
 1/2 cup olive oil (or more)  
 1 1/2 lb. tomatoes, peeled, cored, seeded, and diced  
 1/4 cup capers  
 1/2 cup sliced black olives  
 2 tsp. pine nuts (optional)  
 1/4 cup red wine vinegar  
 1 tsp. sugar

Freshly ground pepper to taste

Cut unpeeled eggplant into cubes about 1/2-3/4-inch square. Put in colander, sprinkle with salt, and allow to stand for about half an hour.

Meanwhile, dice celery and chop onions. Sauté them in 1/2 cup oil in a large skillet over low heat until onions are soft but only slightly browned. Remove from skillet with a slotted spoon.

Pat and squeeze eggplant cubes dry with paper towels and sauté in the oil remaining in the skillet, adding a little more oil if necessary, until lightly browned. Add tomatoes and sautéed onion and celery and cook over low heat about 10 minutes, stirring often. Add capers, olives, pine nuts, vinegar.

sugar and pepper. Mix well, cover, lower heat and simmer 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. If mixture becomes too dry, add a few drops of water during cooking. Taste and correct for seasoning. Cool.

Spoon into glass jars or non-plastic bowl. Cover tightly and chill well before serving. This is best made a day or two before you plan to serve it.

Makes about 5 cups. Use as sandwich accompaniment — especially nice with egg sandwiches made on Italian or French bread, and tuna.

**FRITTATA WITH PASTA**  
 Serves 4

Any type of leftover pasta can be used to make a delicious frittata. Long pasta, such as spaghetti, should be cut in approximately 1-inch lengths; short, thick pasta should be chopped coarsely. If the pasta was previously cooked in a sauce, reduce the amount of butter and oil in this recipe.

2 cups cooked pasta (approximately) 8 eggs  
 1/2 cup grated Parmesan cheese  
 Salt and pepper  
 2 tbs. butter  
 1 tbs. olive oil

Mix all ingredients except the butter and oil. Heat butter and oil in a heavy skillet. When it is rather hot, pour the pasta mixture into the skillet, lower the heat, and let the mixture brown on bottom on low to medium heat. Then run the skillet under the broiler for about 3 minutes to brown on the top. This kind of frittata should be rather crisp, so try to make it a golden-brown color. Serves 4.

To try some of the many possible variations, you could add a couple of teaspoons of tomato paste, herbs, sautéed onions, and so on. But do not overdo the amount of sauce, or the frittata may not hold together.

(from "A Passion for Vegetables" by Vera Geuninger)

## Broiled crab legs are special dinner for 2

Planning an intimate dinner for two? 10 to 12 ounces king crab split legs, thawed if necessary

1 clove garlic, quartered  
 2 tbs. butter  
 2 tsp. lemon juice  
 1 tsp. minced parsley  
 Dash dried basil, crushed

Cut crab into serving pieces. Sauté garlic in butter until golden, remove. Stir lemon juice, parsley and basil into butter. Place crab legs on broiler rack. Brush with butter sauce. Broil 3-5 inches from heat for 3-4 minutes; brush once or twice with the sauce.

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 Serves 2

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