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## For the Love of Leprechauns

By Susie Iventosch



Petar's Irish singer Sinead Healy Photo Susie Iventosch

Leprechauns were among my favorite childhood fantasies. As a little kid, I knew in my heart that one day I would actually meet Lucky, the Lucky Charms leprechaun - a chance meeting at the end of the rainbow. With a twinkle of an eye, he would vanish, leaving only a memory and a pot of gold.

These one-eighth Irish eyes were not smiling the day the truth ushered forth. No such thing as a leprechaun? Was this some kind of trick? It was a somber revelation, the nostalgia eternal.

For many of us, there is no good substitute for a stealthy little leprechaun, not Santa Claus, not the Easter Bunny, and - though she earns high marks in my book - not the Tooth Fairy. All pale in comparison to the tiny green gnomes.

To fill the void, we rekindle childhood fascinations by playing lighthearted tricks - green footprints here, gold dust there, and with a wee bit o' luck, perhaps we will lure leprechauns back into our lives. (I, for one, am holding out hope!)

Or we can head down to Petar's in Lafayette, order up Guinness and lap up a bowl of Irish stew. Perhaps you didn't know that Petar's celebrates St. Patty's Day twice each month. Every other Tuesday the restaurant turns just a little bit Irish, featuring Irish stew along with the beautiful voice and piano of Sinead Healy performing a montage of Irish and American tunes.

Petar's, founded in 1959 and owned by Nosrat and Jeanette Kermaninejad

since 1999, serves lunch six days a week and dinner daily with live music Tuesday through Sunday evenings. Nightly dinner specials range from osso bucco, to lamb shanks, braised short ribs and roasted turkey.

Though Kermaninejad holds a degree in civil engineering, (his five brothers are also engineers) he only worked a brief stint in that field, designing highways and bridges in Iran. The rest of the time he has spent in the restaurant business, mostly owning them, but he's right at home in the kitchen, too. One of eight children, he says he used to follow his mom around when she cooked, helping out where he could.

"I was the designated taste-tester," he remembers. "I really enjoy cooking, but Petar's Irish stew comes from Rusty, one of my chefs from an earlier restaurant venture."

Randy Hellrung and Nicole Kreigenhofer of Antioch stopped in for a drink on the way home from the airport the night I visited Petar's.

"We were sitting at the bar and heard the young lady singing a beautiful Irish tune, and saw the Irish stew on the menu, and decided we had to stay," Hellrung said.

"We felt like we were nestled into a cozy Irish pub in Killarney and were just waiting for everyone to start talking with an Irish accent," he added. "All we needed was someone to light a peat stove and we'd be sitting in Ireland!"

After tasting Petar's Irish stew, Kreigenhofer said, "For a good bowl of comfort food, this really fills the bill."

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Petar's Irish Stew Photo Susie Iventosch

## RECIPES

Included here are two versions of Irish stew. Petar's is a thick, hearty stew made with lamb veggies and barley. The "Brothy" stew, a compilation of several different recipes and made with Guinness stout beer, is a bit more "brothy" and delicious served with thick slices of French bread.

## Brothy Irish Stew

(Serves six or so)

## Ingredients

2 ½ pounds shoulder lamb chop, or shoulder block,  
cut into small chunks\*  
1 teaspoon sea salt  
1 teaspoon black pepper  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
½ cup Guinness, or other stout beer  
3 or 4 large new potatoes cut into quarters  
1 parsnip, peeled and cut into medium-sized chunks  
1 pound baby carrots  
2 cups pearl onions, parboiled and peeled (any color is fine)  
1 ½ cups beef or chicken stock  
3 tablespoons parsley, chopped  
2 teaspoons fresh thyme  
2 bay leaves

Roux for thickening (1 tablespoon melted butter and 2 tablespoons flour mixed into a paste with ½ teaspoon salt and 2 tablespoons stout beer)

## Directions

Season lamb with salt and pepper. Heat oil in Dutch oven, or other large pot with tight-fitting lid, and sear lamb for 2-3 minutes, just to seal in juices. Remove lamb from pot and set aside.

In same pot, pour beer and boil for one minute, scraping up any bits of leftover meat. Place lamb back in pan. Cover with stock. Bring pot to boil and immediately reduce to a simmer. Cover pot and simmer for 45 minutes. Open lid and layer veggies on top of lamb leaving potatoes for top layer. Cover and continue to cook on low simmer for another hour or until meat is tender and falls easily from bones and veggies are cooked through.

If you want to thicken the sauce a wee bit, stir roux into stew and heat until slightly thickened.

Serve hot with thick slices of French bread.

## NOTE

\*Since I am no expert on meat cuts, it's always a bit of a challenge when looking for just the right cut for certain dishes. I rely on the advice of my butcher to get it right! I went into Lunardi's (939-6477 ext. 3) meat department looking for lamb shoulder meat for my Irish stew, and the very knowledgeable and friendly butcher, Dan Kidd, told me the best piece of the lamb to use for Irish stew is the lamb shoulder block. This is the end piece leftover from cutting the lamb shoulder arm and lamb shoulder blade chops. This particular section is very flavorful, but it has a lot of bones, which make it even better for stewing, but difficult to cut into small pieces at home. Dan said that is never a problem, because they are happy to split it, seam out the fat and cut it into stew sized pieces on the butcher saw. All you have to do is ask, or call ahead. He said it is one of the most flavorful parts of the lamb, too.

## Petar's Irish Stew

(Enough for a crowd)

## Ingredients

¼ cup cooking oil or olive oil (or butter)  
5 pounds lamb shoulder pieces  
8 ounces barley  
20 ounces small white onions  
24 ounces white turnips  
4 medium carrots, sliced  
1 pound celery, sliced  
3 medium potatoes  
Salt and pepper to taste

Chopped fresh mint

## Directions

Cut lamb into desired size pieces. Sauté in pan with half of the oil. When meat is

browned, remove from pan and add vegetables to the cooking oil and sauté, adding more oil, if necessary.

Meanwhile, in a separate pot, bring about 4 quarts of water to boil and add barley. Reduce heat and cook for 35-40 minutes, until barley is almost cooked. Add the barley and cooking liquid to the meat and vegetable mixture with some chopped mint. Season to taste with salt and pepper. Cover and simmer for one to two hours. Serve with more chopped mint, or mint leaves as garnish.

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