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FLOUNDER AU GRATIN

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It's holiday time again! There are only a handful of things that I get as excited about as the holidays...one of them happens to be anything au gratin! Seeing as how it's the season for eating and parties, I wanted this issue's recipe to be something you could serve or bring to any holiday meal. As it is also the time of year when the southern flounder are running, I thought it fitting to use it as my seafood of choice. It's a firm, white fish so it works beautifully in casseroles such as this. My mother is from Louisiana and I grew up in the south, so I have had my share of au gratins, and have been taught many methods. This recipe is a variation of a New Orleans crab au gratin that I have always made and loved. I modified the recipe further by adding potatoes as a "crust" in the bottom to not only stretch the dish a little, but also add heartiness and texture. This easy flounder au gratin is guaranteed to be a side dish superstar at any holiday party, or at your family's dinner table!

Olive oil for sauteing
Salt and pepper for taste
4 c sliced (1/4" thick) baby gold potatoes
5 medium flounder fillets
1/2 c butter
1 c finely chopped onion

1 stalk celery, finely chopped
2 tblsp chopped green onion
1/2 c all-purpose flour
2 1/4 c evaporated milk
1 tsp salt
1/2 tsp cayenne

1/2 tsp ground black pepper
2 egg yolks
1/4 c melted butter
3 c panko bread crumbs
1 c grated parmesan cheese
1 c grated cheddar cheese

Preheat oven to 350°.

In a large skillet over medium heat, warm 2 tablespoons olive oil and sauté potatoes until they soften, about 8 minutes. Season with salt and pepper, and set aside.

In a same skillet over medium heat, warm 2 tablespoons olive oil and sauté flounder fillets until cooked through, about 4 minutes per side. Season with salt and pepper, and set aside.

In same skillet over medium heat add 1/2 cup butter, onion, celery and chives and sauté until onion is translucent, about 8 minutes. Add flour and mix until incorporated. Gradually add milk and seasonings, stirring constantly. Cook until thickened, about 5 minutes. Remove from heat.

Add a small teaspoon of sautéed onion mixture to egg yolks and stir vigorously to temper eggs. Add egg yolks to remaining vegetables in skillet and beat with a spoon until thoroughly incorporated. Reduce heat to low and cook until thickened, about 5 minutes.

Remove from heat and fold in cooked flounder fillets. Don't break up the fillets too much as it's nice to get some big and small pieces throughout the dish for texture.

Line the bottom of a greased 9"x12" casserole dish with cooked potatoes. (I used an oval dish that was slightly smaller than 9"x12" and it worked great.) Top potatoes evenly with flounder mixture.

Mix melted butter, bread crumbs, and cheeses in a bowl and top evenly over flounder mixture.

Bake until golden-brown and bubbly, about 35 minutes.

- Recipe and photos by Heather Peterek, *Staff Seafood Enthusiast*