



ISTRIA

Recipes and stories from the hidden heart
of Italy, Slovenia and Croatia

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When my mother arrived in Australia aged 22, she couldn't really cook. She had worked front-of-house in her parents' bars, but they always had a cook. Having an Istrian husband, who lived for good food, proved to be somewhat of a challenge. He was not adventurous in the kitchen; a whiff of something that was foreign to him and he wouldn't even try it. He craved dishes that reminded him of home. Luckily they had a network of friends who were mainly from Istria, and my mother learned to cook from these Istrian ladies: Gemma, Jolanda, Maria, Alba and Emma. She perfected a handful of dishes that made my father very happy, and one of them was this – *patate in tecia*, which literally means 'potatoes in the pan'. Cooked potatoes are roughly smashed into onion that has been cooked slowly in plenty of olive oil. It is a bit like a vegan version of mashed potatoes. Don't be alarmed by the amount of olive oil that is used, as olive oil is extremely good for you. It is a deceptively simple dish, but very, very good.

Smashed potatoes with onion & olive oil

(Patate in tecia)

Serves 4 as a side dish

750 g (1 lb 11 oz) mashing potatoes (such as king william, desiree, Dutch cream)

sea salt

1 large onion, about 280 g (10 oz)

80 ml (⅓ cup) good-quality extra virgin olive oil

Wash and peel the potatoes, then cut into large chunks. Place them in a saucepan and cover with plenty of cold water. Bring to the boil slowly, add a good pinch of salt, then cook for 10–15 minutes, until the potato is fork-tender but still whole. The cooking time will depend on the size of the potatoes.

While the potato is cooking, cut the onion into 2–3 mm (⅛–1⁄6 in) thick rings, then cut the rings in half, into semi-circles. Pour the olive oil into a saucepan large enough to fit the potato; it should thickly cover the base. Add the onion with a pinch of salt and cook over medium–low heat for about 25 minutes, or until the onion is lightly caramelised and pale golden.

Drain the potato well, reserving a little of the cooking water in case the potato becomes too dry. Stir the potato through the caramelised onion, mashing roughly with a fork; the potato should start breaking apart. You don't want a smooth purée – having the occasional small potato chunk is part of the charm of this dish. Add some of the reserved potato cooking water if it looks a bit dry, stirring well, until you are happy with the consistency. Season with salt to taste.

Remove from the heat and serve immediately.