

Steak with mustard butter and French fries

STEAK FRITES AU BEURRE DE MOUTARDE

Serves 2

To make this bistro classic in my kitchen, I use a cast-iron skillet or grill pan that I get really hot, and then I sear the steak on both sides, cooking it medium-rare, which is the way I like it. My preferred cut is *entrecôte*, or rib-eye, and I ask the butcher to cut it into steaks that aren't too thick since I like lots of surface area on my steaks. I rub them with chipotle chile powder to give them a bit of a smoky flavor.

It's difficult to say exactly how long it will take a particular steak to cook to your liking since there are so many variables, but there is actually no truth to the rumor that if you cut a steak open a little and peek inside, all the juices will come gushing out and your steak will be dry. In fact, the best way to ensure a steak is dry is to overcook it. So feel free to peek inside if you need to.

- 1 Pat the steaks dry and rub them with the salt, chipotle powder, and cilantro. Refrigerate the steaks, uncovered, for at least 1 hour, or up to 8 hours.
- 2 To make the mustard butter, in a small bowl, mash together the butter with the dry mustard and the Dijon. Form it into two mounds and chill on a plastic wrap-lined plate.
- 3 Heat a little oil or clarified butter in a grill pan or cast-iron skillet and cook the steaks over high heat, being sure to get a good sear on each side. For rare steaks, cook 5 to 7 minutes total on both sides, or *aller-retour* ("to go and return").
- 4 Remove the steaks from the pan and put on plates. Top each steak with a knob of the mustard butter and some pepper and serve with a big pile of *frites*.

2 (8-ounce/225g) rib-eye steaks
1/2 teaspoon hickory-smoked salt, sea salt, or kosher salt
1/4 to 1/2 teaspoon chipotle chile powder
1 teaspoon finely chopped fresh cilantro or flat-leaf parsley
Vegetable oil or clarified butter (page 327)
Freshly ground black pepper

MUSTARD BUTTER

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, at room temperature
2 teaspoons dry mustard or mustard powder
1 generous teaspoon Dijon mustard

French fries (page 219)

French fries

FRITES

Serves 4 to 6

3 pounds (1.3kg) potatoes
4 tablespoons olive oil
2 teaspoons sea salt or kosher salt
Fresh herbs, such as a big handful of sage leaves, a few sprigs rosemary or thyme, or a mixture of them

Although they didn't invent them (the Belgians did), the French love French fries. Such is their devotion that after I attempted to make them at home in a large pot of oil on the stove without a lot of success (and making a big mess), a French friend told me everyone in France has a deep-fryer at home. He was surprised when I told him that home fryers weren't so popular in America, which he thought was odd, considering how well known Americans are for liking deep-fried foods.

Equally hard to believe is that good fries in Paris are not necessarily a given. I was once so discouraged by getting yet another plate of soggy *frites* that I tied them in knots and left them on my plate, which was whisked away after I ate everything else without a word from the waiter. When I asked a restaurant owner why the fries served at his place were so soft, he said, "I used to make them crispy, but too many customers complained." Yowza. Who could complain about crisp fries?

At home, crisp fries were eluding me as well, until I switched to oven-baked fries, which are simple to make and a lot less messy. Soaking them in cold water allows them to brown up nicely in the oven and they get extra crispy on the outside. I toss in a big handful of sage leaves and some thyme sprigs—the sage leaves get crackly-crisp with the fries and they're quite tasty to crunch on, and the thyme adds an additional bit of savory flavor.

Any russet potato will make good baked French fries. I leave some of the skin on, for a more handmade look.

- 1 Peel the potatoes, leaving on a few strips of skin as you go. Cut the potatoes into $\frac{1}{3}$ -inch-thick (1cm) slices. Lay the slices on a cutting board and slice them into $\frac{1}{3}$ -inch-wide (1cm) sticks. Put them in a large bowl with very cold, lightly salted water, and let them sit for 1 hour.
- 2 Preheat the oven to 400°F (200°C).
- 3 Drain the potatoes and lay them on a kitchen towel. Rub them with the towel to dry them very well. Spray two baking sheets with nonstick cooking spray. Place the potatoes on the

continued