



Belgian Fries (Kitchen Gardener Style)

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Introduction:

"No, Madame, I am not from Paris. I am Belgian." If you've read Agatha Christie, you'll recognize that this is super detective Hercule Poirot setting the record straight about his origins. They could also be the words of a fried, french-cut potato if it could talk. Belgium is not alone in suffering culinary misattributions. Ukrainians bristle each time they hear Russia receive credit for borscht. Italians scoff at what passes for authentic Italian-style pizza outside of their borders. And I know of no better way to infuriate a Scotsman than to tell him that the Irish invented whisky. Still, the injustice done to the Belgians over the fried potato this past century (the term "french fry" was coined in 1894) stands out as being particularly poignant. To truly understand what I mean, you have to travel to Belgium. There you will see that the fry is not only a key part of the Belgian national dish (ie. moules frites - mussels and fries), it is nothing less than a way of life. Wherever you go in Belgium, you will find people of all ages, sizes, and backgrounds eating their beloved "frites" or "friet" as they are called in Flemish-speaking Belgium. Along with the Belgian monarchy and beer, fries are one of the few things that binds this multi-lingual, multi-cultural hodgepodge of a country together. They are to Belgium what the baguette is to France, the food of the people and a national culinary symbol. Knowing all this helps put the potato-dominated layout of the typical Belgian kitchen garden into perspective. For not only do Belgians take pride in making their frites from scratch, many add an extra step to the recipe by growing their own potatoes. The official potato variety for Belgian fries is Binjete which accounts for nearly 3/4 of all the potatoes grown in Belgium. Non-Europeans looking for an acceptable substitute can use Yukon Gold, Russet, or another starchy variety. So what's the Belgian secret to making good fries? Well, there are two in fact. The first is the cut of the potatoes which is thicker than the matchsticks many US fry-eaters are accustomed to. The second, which relates to the first, is that Belgians cook their fries twice, once for cooking the potato, the second time for giving it a crispy, golden crunch. The recipe below is adapted from one at the One and Only Official Belgian Fries Website which is well worth a visit, as is Belgium I might add.

Preparation:

1. Grow your own potatoes
2. Peel potatoes and cut into 1cm X 1cm sticks (.5"x.5")
3. Rinse potatoes to remove excess starch
4. Dry the potatoes and begin heating the deep fryer
5. When the temperature reaches 160°C (320°F), put in a handful of fries and no more so as not to cool down the oil too much.
6. Fry for a few minutes (4-8 depending on the thickness and the kind of potatoes) stirring regularly to prevent sticking.
7. Put the fries into a large bowl lined with paper towels and let them cool down for 1/2 hour.
8. Heat oil to 190°C (375°F) and fry for 2-3 minutes until crispy and golden brown.
9. Serve with salt, mayonnaise,

and a beer (the Belgian way!)

Image (optional):

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Ingredients:

starchy potatoesfrying oilsalt

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