

# Rachel Doyle

*Finding magic in humble ingredients*

**A**S THE RIVER BARROW MEANDERS NEARBY, ornamental grasses wave in a light breeze while flowers gently nod their heads. Leaves rustle above, backlit by the sun into overlapping stained-glass patterns. A tour of the inspirational gardens at Arboretum demonstrates the effect of colour on our mood, and the role that nurturing living things plays in our wellbeing. The riot of textures, forms, and scents dazzles the senses and sets green fingers to itching.

Suitably inspired, gardeners can move on to chat with the team of qualified plant experts and browse the kitchen store, home and gift shop, furniture area, and fashion department. Arboretum's flagship 10-acre site in Leighlinbridge is a haven for lifestyle and gardening, but a visit wouldn't be complete without pausing for refreshment at Rachel's Garden Café. It's the namesake of Arboretum founder Rachel Doyle, a champion of great home cooking who learned by her parents' example how best to grow food and put it on the table.

"My dad and mam John and Ann Candy had a huge influence on me growing up in Clonmore, near Hacketstown in County Carlow, close to the Wicklow border. Dad grew everything for the table, our fruit and vegetables; he also had a lovely ornamental garden. He and my brothers cut turf in the bog, providing fuel for cooking and keeping us warm in the wintertime. When it snowed, we could be snowed in for several days in the valley."

She also recalls nature's larder being well stocked. "We were foragers before it became popular, picking mushrooms, blackberries, crab apples and sloes, all used by my mam to make savoury dishes, jams and jellies." It was a more wholesome time altogether: "In the 50s and 60s country folk in Ireland grew everything for the table. Between our homegrown produce and the eggs from our hens, we lived on a healthy diet with absolutely no additives."

Rachel's love of cooking began in her mam's kitchen.

"Mam was a super cook and could make a nourishing meal out of anything. I loved her letting me cook and when I was in school, I wanted to become a domestic science teacher; but as it happened, I'm glad my parents didn't have the money to send me to college.

"When I wasn't in the kitchen with Mam, I was out in the garden with Dad once he came home from work. Ultimately, I pursued a career in horticulture, going back to college at 22 — a career that I didn't know existed when I was a young girl in Clonmore. This love for cooking and gardening stood to me when I decided to set up the Arboretum over 45 years ago."

Rachel has selected her mam's recipe for boxty, a traditional potato pancake. "As we lived inland, we didn't have access to fresh fish on Fridays and boxty was often served instead. There's an old Irish saying that goes 'Boxty on the griddle, boxty on the pan, if you can't make boxty, you'll never get a man!'" The recipe handed down to Rachel now spans four generations, shared in turn with her children and their kids.

"Potatoes were the staple of our main meal. We never got pasta, and rice belonged in a pudding made with milk. I love my food, but if I could only have one thing to eat for the rest of my life it would be potatoes, with chocolate a close second!"

Rachel doesn't come by her love of the humble spud strangely. "Carlow has some of the most fertile soil in Europe. We are very fortunate to have Teagasc Research Station in Oak Park. This is where some of the finest potato varieties were bred: Roosters, Orla, Colleen and Cara. Also, Carlow people were referred to as 'scallionaters' — and that's why I have chosen an old recipe Mam made regularly using both ingredients."

Rachel Doyle wearing her mam's gold wedding band.



◆ Makes: 18 boxty

Prep: 35 mins / Cook: 30 mins

Difficulty: Easy



# Mam's Boxy

*“This was very much a regular treat in our house growing up. I continued the tradition with my two sons when they were young—now, I love to make it for my five grandchildren. It’s a delicious way to use up leftover mash.”*

## Ingredients

- 480g plain flour
- 2 heaped tsp baking powder
- ¼ tbsp salt
- 600g mashed potato (made from about 1kg raw)
- 1 large potato, grated, rinsed well in cold water, placed in a tea towel and squeezed to remove excess liquid (if desired)
- 2 cups buttermilk
- 2 eggs, beaten (if desired)
- 3 scallions, chopped
- butter for frying

## Method

- 1 In a bowl, mix the flour, baking powder and salt.
- 2 In another large bowl mix the mashed potato and grated raw potato (if using; I prefer it without the grated).
- 3 Add the flour and baking powder mixture to the potatoes and mix well.
- 4 Slowly add the buttermilk, eggs (if using), and chopped scallions. Do not over-mix. The consistency should be a thick batter; add more buttermilk if necessary.
- 5 Heat a non-stick frying pan or griddle pan on medium-to-high heat and add some butter.
- 6 When the butter is melted and bubbling, take a scone-sized amount of batter (a large spoonful), dollop it into the hot butter in the pan, turn down the heat and fry until golden brown on one side (about 4 minutes on low-to-medium heat).
- 7 Turn over and continue to cook on the other side until done (about another 4 minutes; longer if you are using grated raw potato). At this point, you can press the boxy down to flatten them.

Mam always used scallions (and sometimes eggs, to add protein to our diet). I believe the grated potatoes were added if there wasn't enough leftover mash.

Once fried on the pan or the griddle, the flattened boxy can be cut in two and served as you would a sandwich filled with salad, tomatoes and cucumber; or if flexible enough, rolled into a wrap with the filling of your choice. They're delicious topped with almost anything—bacon; eggs; smoked salmon and soured cream. They're also an absolute treat served as part of a traditional Irish breakfast!