Select and Prepare Potatoes

MOST POTATO RECIPES simply call for a certain amount of "potatoes," but they do not recommend to the cook what type of potato to use. It seems logical then that any type of potato for any recipe is acceptable, right? Wrong. Ingredients are like tools: You need the right ones to complete the job correctly. Potatoes are no different. We will consider ways in which to cook potatoes and how to choose the best potato for the job.



Objectives:

1. Explain basic potato cookery methods.
2. Identify the proper potato type for various cooking techniques.

Key Terms:

all-purpose potatoes
au gratin
baked potatoes
boiled potatoes
chef's potatoes
combination method
enzymatic browning
fried potatoes
gnocchi
Idaho potatoes
Lyonnaise potatoes
mashed potatoes
mealy potatoes
microwave potatoes
new potatoes
red potatoes
roasted potatoes
russet potatoes
sautéed potatoes
starchy potatoes
steamed potatoes
sweet potatoes
waxy potatoes
whipped potatoes
white potatoes
yams
Yukon Gold potatoes (Yukon)

Potato Cooking Methods

Most people know there are various methods for preparing potatoes. However, these people may not be aware of an important fact: In many recipes, a specific potato type must be used.

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MOIST COOKERY METHODS

Moist cookery methods for potatoes include boiling and steaming.

Boiled Potatoes

Boiled potatoes are potatoes that require food to be in boiling liquid that is at least 212°F and that bubbles vigorously with clouds of steam. In a rolling boil, the liquid boils very fast.

Steamed Potatoes

Steamed potatoes are potatoes that retain more of the potato's vitamins and minerals than boiled potatoes and require the food to be suspended over boiling liquid. The liquid for boiling and steaming is usually water but could be any flavorful liquid (e.g., stock or wine).

Mashed or Whipped Potatoes

Potatoes cooked with a moist method could be served as is or may be further processed by smashing, mashing, or ricing—the physical process of using a hand tool or machine to smash or purée the potatoes to remove the lumps. **Mashed potatoes** are potatoes that are boiled, crushed, or puréed and then mixed with butter, salt, pepper, and milk or cream. **Whipped potatoes** (e.g., Duchess potatoes) are potatoes that differ from mashed potatoes in that they are often processed with a ricer and contain eggs or egg yolks that bind and lighten the potato mixture for piping.



FIGURE 1. Mashed potatoes.

DRY HEAT COOKING METHODS

Dry heat cooking methods for potatoes result in a finished product of their own or could be the basis for further processing. Dry heat methods include frying (deep or pan), sautéing, baking, roasting, grilling, and using a microwave oven.

Baked Potatoes

Baked potatoes are potatoes with their skin on that are baked in a hot oven until tender. They can be scooped out of their shell and whipped in a bowl for a fluffier version of mashed potatoes. In addition, they may be mashed and flavored with butter, cheese, sour cream, herbs,

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and spices; returned to the empty potato shells; and baked again to create a "double-baked" or "twice-baked potato." Dauphinoise potatoes are sliced raw and baked as a gratin or **au gratin**— layers of potatoes sprinkled with cheese and breadcrumbs and baked until tender and browned.

Roasted Potatoes

Roasted potatoes are potatoes that are peeled and cooked in a hot oven using a little fat to brown the outside during the roasting process.

Fried Potatoes

Fried potatoes are potatoes that always require the use of hot oil for cooking. Deep-frying potatoes is submerging the potatoes in hot oil. It results in a completed product (e.g., French fries). Pan-frying is cooking the potatoes in a fry or sauté pan partially filled with oil. This offers many potential variations, such as Potatoes O'Brien (fried with onions and green peppers), hashed browned, **lyonnaise potatoes** (potatoes that are pan fried with onions), Anna potato cakes, and American home fries.

Sautéed Potatoes

Sautéed potatoes are potatoes that use the least amount of fat, but they are still "fried" potatoes. They are cooked in a constantly moving pan on the stove that results in potatoes that will not be as crisp as potatoes made via other frying methods.

Microwave Potatoes

Microwave potatoes are potatoes that are fully cooked in a microwave oven. Any potato may be cooked in this way, but this method is best when the person desires a "quick baked potato."

COMBINATION METHOD

The **combination method** is the use of two or more cooking methods (dry and moist) in the prepa-



FIGURE 2. Dauphinoise potatoes with Gruyère cheese baked as a gratin.



FIGURE 3. Potatoes Anna (pommes de terre Anna) is an arranged potato cake that often accompanies a steak or a pork chop.

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ration of one potato dish. A good example would be a potato that is baked, mashed, mixed with flour and eggs, formed into a dumpling, and boiled. This mixture produces potato dumplings or **gnocchi**—walnut-size potato or flour dumplings mixed with eggs, butter, seasoning, and one or more flavors (e.g., cheese, spinach, or nutmeg). Duchess potatoes are common in many restaurants. They begin as boiled Yukon that are drained, placed in the oven for a short time to evaporate some moisture, and puréed. Butter and seasonings are added to the hot purée, and then eggs or egg yolks are added to bind the mixture. Finally, the hot mixture is piped through a pastry bag fitted with a star tip around Coquilles St. Jacques (for example) or into a mold, brushed with egg, and baked to brown the edges.



FIGURE 4. Duchess potatoes piped around the dish Coquilles St. Jacques.

Selecting Potatoes Based on Cookery Methods

Potatoes must be the proper type for a recipe to result in the desired consistency. Therefore, you should be knowledgeable of the types of potatoes and the recipes in which they should or should not be used.

STARCHY OR MEALY POTATOES

For baking, frying, and mashing, **starchy potatoes** or **mealy potatoes** (a group of potatoes that are high in starch and low in sugar) are excellent choices. The most common examples are **russet potatoes**, **Idaho potatoes**, and **chef's potatoes** that are long in shape, with brown skin and white flesh. These potatoes bake and mash fluffy and fry crisp. Their skins are edible.



FIGURE 5. A baked russet potato with a salt crust.

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FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: Potato Recipes

Most people love potatoes, and why not? They are delicious and versatile enough to cook in countless ways from the simple baked potato to the classic cold French soup vichyssoise. However, many people stick with what they know: French fries, baked potatoes, mashed potatoes, and potato salad.

Explore the possibilities of potatoes. Try Mexican oven roasted potatoes with salsa, sweet potato biscuits, au gratin potatoes, or pecan sweet potato pie. Other options are roasted yams in honey butter and potato bread.

To see more great recipes for potatoes, visit the link below:

http://www.potatopatchrecipes.com/recipe-index/

WAXY POTATOES

For boiling or steaming, **waxy potatoes** (a group of potatoes that are high in sugar and low in starch) are excellent choices because they hold their shape well after cooking, especially when cut in pieces for salads or soups. Examples of waxy potatoes are **new potatoes** (small, round, immature red or white potatoes with tissue paper thin skin) or mature **red potatoes** or **white potatoes** (roundish in shape with thin skin and a pale white flesh). For roasting and whipping, waxy potatoes are also an excellent choice. They have enough body to whip very well and to hold their shape in cold salads. The skins are fully edible.

ALL-PURPOSE POTATOES

For most cookery methods, **all-purpose potatoes** (a group of potatoes that have moderate levels of sugar and starch) are a good choice. Examples of all-purpose potatoes are mature or fully grown red and white potatoes, **Yukon Gold potatoes** (roundish in shape and rich yellow under thin beige skin), and Peruvian blue potatoes—heirloom potatoes that are roundish with a reddish-purplish colored flesh. The skin of most all-purpose potatoes is edible.

SWEET POTATOES AND YAMS

Sweet potatoes are usually tubular in shape with a bright yellow-orange-red flesh. **Yams** are tropical tubers often mistaken for sweet potatoes and range in color from white to purple; they are more nutritious than Irish potatoes. Both types are considered all-purpose "potatoes." Their bright colored flesh makes them visually appealing for use in the culinary arts. Yams have less starch and less sugar than sweet potatoes. Both have a fibrous (stringy) inedible skin.

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ENZYMATIC BROWNING

After white- or yellow-fleshed potatoes are peeled or cut, they must be cooked or kept under water to prevent discoloration. The discoloration is usually darkening called **enzymatic browning** that occurs when oxygen comes in contact with the exposed flesh of potatoes. To prevent enzymatic browning, it is necessary to cook them immediately or to keep them submerged in water. Keeping cut potato surfaces from being exposed to the air prevents the chemical reaction of enzymatic browning.

Summary:



Dry heat methods of cooking potatoes are baking, frying (deep and pan), grilling, using a microwave oven, roasting, and sautéing. Some potatoes (e.g., chef's, Idaho, russet, and some waxy types) bake and mash fluffy and fry crisp. Their skins are edible.

Moist heat methods of cooking potatoes are boiling and steaming. Most potatoes cooked by a moist heat method receive more processing (e.g., whipping, roasting, ricing, or mixing with sauces and/or cheese). Examples are waxy potatoes (e.g., new, red, or white types or sweet potatoes and yams). Waxy potatoes hold their shape well in stews, salads, and soups.

All-purpose potatoes include full-grown red or white potatoes and Yukon Gold potatoes. These types may be used successfully with most cooking methods. Their skins are edible.

All potatoes are used in the combination method of cookery in which two or more cooking methods (dry and moist; mashed and baked) are used to create a different product. Sweet potatoes and yams are versatile and more nutritious than Irish potato types. However, their skin is inedible.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What is the difference between a russet and an Idaho potato?
2. Which type of potato would be best for making French fries?
3. Potato salad requires that potatoes be cut into pieces and boiled until tender. Then they are mixed with other ingredients, and they still need to hold their shape. Which potatoes would be best to use for potato salad?
4. Define the "combination" cooking method.
5. List potatoes that may be pan-fried.

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Expanding Your Knowledge:



Many varieties of potatoes are available in markets around the world, and countless recipes for potatoes exist from culture to culture. Do some research and find which potatoes are common in other countries and cultures. Write a paper about the typical uses and recipes for potatoes in other countries and cultures as well as the historical role of potatoes in countries such as Ireland, Russia, and China.

Web Links:



Types of Potatoes
http://www.all-about-potatoes.com/types-of-potatoes.html

Potato Recipes
http://southernfood.about.com/cs/potatorecipes/a/potatoes_2.htm

Potatoes 101
http://www.ochef.com/167.htm

Potato Varieties
http://www.healthypotato.com/AboutPotatoes/Potato_Varieties.php

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