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Preparation and care for perfect Idaho® potatoes

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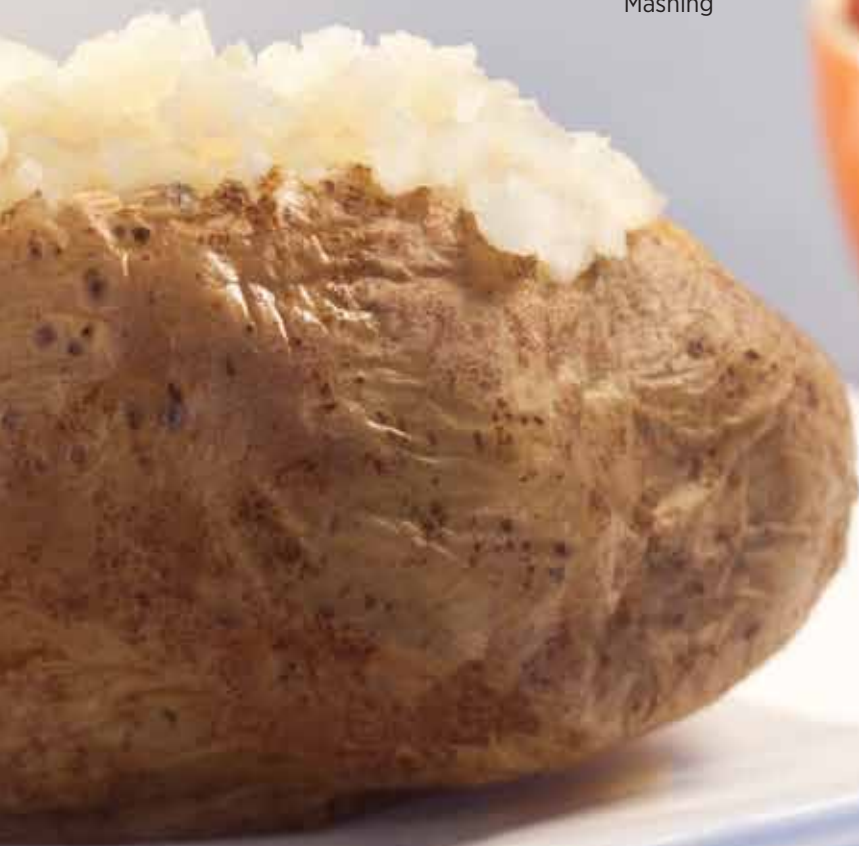


Potatoes



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recipe on cover.

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Preparation and care for perfect Idaho® potatoes

Storing

Store potatoes in their original cartons or bags, completely covered, and away from light. The ideal storage temperature range is 45–48°F, unless using for fresh fries. The potatoes for fresh fries should be stored at 55°F.

Cleaning

Wash Idaho® potatoes lightly in water before boiling or baking. However, if you are not going to cook your potatoes immediately, avoid scrubbing them with water because they can start to go moldy in warm or damp weather.



Peeling

Carefully trim any green or discolored patches or dark eyes with the tip of a knife or potato peeler. This is not necessary if you are going to peel them after cooking, when they will come out of their skins easily. Place the potatoes in enough water to cover them. We recommend a solution of 1 teaspoon of acid such as lemon juice or white wine vinegar to a gallon of water to prevent potatoes from turning brown.

You can boil the potatoes, allow them to cool, and then peel them. The taste is fresher and earthier if they are prepared this way, and they are perfect for eating plain or simply garnished. Much of the goodness and flavor of an Idaho potato is in the skin. Leaving the skins on adds more flavor and texture, and is a vital source of fiber in the diet.



To peel potatoes, use a sharp potato peeler to remove the thinnest layer possible in long, even strips.

Place the potatoes in a saucepan of water so they are just covered. Cook them immediately to avoid loss of vitamin C.



Chopping

Recipes for potatoes often require them to be chopped or diced for salads or “oven fried potatoes.” If you are cooking them first, the best potatoes to choose are those high in solids and starch, which stay firm. They chop most easily when they are cold and peeled.

To chop, cut the potato in half, then in half again and again until it is cut up evenly.

Slicing

How you slice potatoes will affect both the appearance of the dish and the cooking time. Cut slices the same thickness to cook evenly. To make rounder slices, cut across the width of the potato; for longer slices, cut along the length. If you need to slice cooked potatoes for a recipe, undercook them slightly so they don't fall to pieces, and chill before handling.

Put the tip of the knife on the work surface or cutting board first, then press the heel of the knife down firmly to create nice even slices.



Slicing with a Mandolin

Named after the musical instrument, the mandolin has several different cutting blades, which vary both the size and the shape of the cut potato. The blades are fitted into a metal, plastic, or wooden framework for ease of use. It is excellent for slicing potatoes evenly, and can produce slices from very thin to very thick, as well as fluted slices for crinkle-cut potato chips. The mandolin must be used with care because of its very sharp blades. Rotate the knob on the side of the mandolin to adjust the blade to the thickness required, then, holding the potato, carefully slide it firmly up and down or across the blade, using the protective guard to safeguard fingers.



Dicing

If the recipe calls for diced potatoes, this means you have to be more precise than for chopping and cut the potato into evenly shaped cubes. When the dices are uniform in size, they cook evenly and brown nicely.

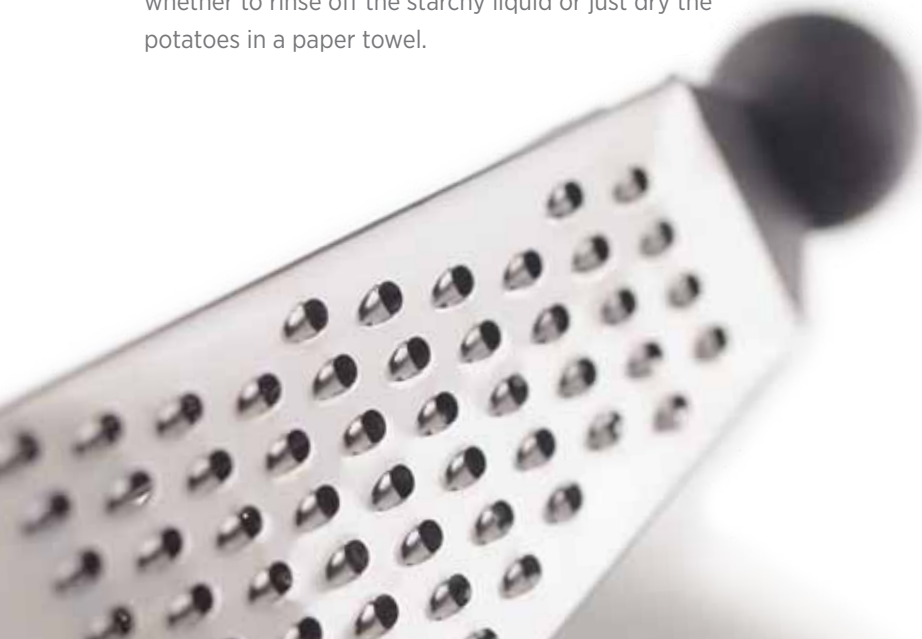


To dice the potatoes, cut the sides and ends of the potato to make a neat rectangle (keeping the outside pieces for other uses or for adding to a soup). Then cut the rectangle into thick, even slices. Turn over the stack of slices and cut them lengthwise into thick lengths and finally crossways into even cubes that are the size needed for the recipe you are following.

Grating

Potatoes can be grated before or after cooking, depending on how you will be using them. They are easier to grate after cooking, but must have had time to cool. They can be grated on the large blade straight into the cooking dish or frying pan. Don't overcook the potatoes, as they will just fall to pieces. Starchy potatoes are ideal for mashing, and waxy ones for making salads or hash, like reds or Yukon Golds.

Raw potatoes, like russets, exude a surprising amount of starchy liquid that is vital to helping some dishes stick together. Check the recipe before you begin as to whether you need to keep this liquid. The recipe typically will tell you whether to rinse off the starchy liquid or just dry the potatoes in a paper towel.



Making Potato Chips

Homemade potato chips can be very difficult if you do not have the right tools for making them. To make a large batch, slice the potatoes in a food processor, but for a small batch, use the slicing blade on a standard grater or the mandolin. It is possible to use a sharp knife to make chips, but you need to be very careful to cut fine slices.

French Fries

There are many different names for French fries, depending on how thin or thick they are cut. The larger you cut them the healthier they will be, since they will absorb less fat during the cooking. You can also make fries with their skins on, giving additional fiber and a more homemade appearance.

Traditional fries: Use the largest suitable potatoes and cut into 5/8" thick slices, or thicker if you wish. Turn the slices on their side and cut into 5/8" strips or use a French fry cutter.

Pommes frites: Cut as for traditional French fries, but slice again into neat, even strips about 1/3" thick, either by hand or with a machine.

Pommes allumettes: Cut the potato into a neat rectangle by removing the rounded sides, then into thin slices and then julienne strips. Pommes allumettes should be about half the thickness of pommes frites.

Steak fries: Cut the potato lengthwise into 8 sections before frying.

Shoestring fries: These are quite thin, cut into slices lengthwise, then small Julienne strips.

Crinkle cut fries: When making from scratch, use the mandolin for the fluted slices.



Making Ribbons or Curls

Thin ribbons or curls, which are delicious when deep-fried, can be simply cut with a potato peeler (an apple peeler can also be used).

Peel the potato like an apple, to give long strips. Keep the ribbons in a bowl of cold water and pat dry before frying.



Hasselback and Fan Potatoes

To make Hasselback potatoes, wash and dry potatoes. Then slice vertically, nearly all the way through. You can use a flexible cutting board, or wooden chopsticks, placed on either side of the potato to cut to a consistent depth. Brush with oil, season with salt and pepper, and put them in to roast as soon as possible, before they begin to discolor.

To make potato fans, use medium russet potatoes of long or oval shape and cut them at a slight angle, slicing almost, but not quite all the way through. Press the potato gently on the top until it flattens and fans out at the same time. If you don't cut far enough through it will not fan, but if you cut too far it will split into sections. The best way to cook both of these preparations is to coat them with melted butter and oil and roast them in the oven, preheated to 375°F, for 40–50 minutes.



Blanching

Potatoes are blanched (part-cooked) to soften the skin for several reasons—for easy peeling, to remove excess starch for certain recipes, and to par-cook before frying or roasting. Use a draining spoon or basket to remove large chunks or slices of potato, but when you are cooking small pieces, put them in a wire basket for easy removal.

Place the prepared potatoes in a pan of cold water. Bring slowly to boil and boil gently for 5 minutes or until fork tender. Drain and use or leave in fresh, cold water until ready to use.



Steaming

All potatoes steam well, but this gentle way of cooking is particularly good for very starchy potatoes and those that fall apart easily. Small potatoes, such as new potatoes, taste really delicious when they are steamed in their skins. Make sure that larger potatoes are cut quite small, in even-size chunks or thick slices. Leaving cooked potatoes over a steaming pan of water is also a good way to keep them warm.

1. Place the prepared potatoes in a sieve, colander, or vegetable steamer over a deep pan of boiling, salted water. Cover as tightly as possible and steam for 5–7 minutes. For smaller cuts or slices, increase the time to 20 minutes or more if the potatoes are in large pieces.
2. Towards the end of the cooking time, test a few of the potatoes with the tines of a fork. If they are cooked, turn off the heat and leave until you are ready to serve them. They will keep warm above the water.



Boiling

Boiling is the simplest way of cooking potatoes. Place potatoes of a similar size, either whole or cut into chunks, with or without their skins, in a pan with sufficient water to cover them.



- Starchy potatoes need very gentle boiling, or you may find the outside is cooked before the inside is ready, and they will become mushy or fall apart.
 - New potatoes, which have a high vitamin C content, should be put straight into boiling water, cooked for about 15 minutes, and not left soaking.
 - Very firm potatoes for salads can be put into boiling water and simmered for 5–10 minutes. Reduce heat. Simmer in the hot water for an additional 5–10 minutes.
- When they have finished cooking, drain in a colander and return potatoes to the pan to dry off. For really dry potatoes (for mashing, for instance), leave them over a very low heat so any moisture can escape. Additionally, you can sprinkle the potatoes with salt and shake occasionally until the potatoes stick to the sides of the pan.
 - Cover potatoes with a lid or clean dish towel until ready to serve.

Shallow Frying or Sautéing

This is a quick way to use up leftover potatoes. Use a large cast iron frying pan for even distribution of heat and to give sufficient room to turn the food as it cooks:



1. Heat together about 2 Tbsp. butter and 2 Tbsp. oil until bubbling. Put an even layer of cooked or par-cooked potatoes in the hot fat. Cook potatoes for 4–5 minutes without turning until the undersides turn golden brown.
2. Turn over the potatoes gently with a large spatula once or twice during cooking, leaving 4–5 minutes between turning, until they are golden brown all over.



Deep-Frying

Whether you fry with vegetable, peanut, or olive oil, be sure it is fresh and clean. Fry in small batches to prevent the temperature from dropping and to avoid uneven cooking. Remove any burned pieces after each batch, as this can break down the fat.

To deep-fry potatoes, preheat the oil in a deep, heavy saucepan with a tight-fitting lid or use a deep-fat fryer. Fill the saucepan about half full or to the indicated fill line on the deep-fat fryer. To test, drop a piece of bread in the oil. It should turn to a golden color in about one minute.

The best fries are blanched before frying. This removes excess starch and ensures even browning. You can use the water-blanching method by boiling 2–3 minutes, rinsing, and covering again in cold water. When ready to fry, dry the potatoes thoroughly in a cloth or on paper towels—any moisture will make the oil splash and spit.

The alternative blanching method is to par-fry the potatoes at 325°F for 3–5 minutes. This partially cooks and seals the potatoes without browning. Drain potatoes and when cooled, spread fries in single layer on a parchment-lined tray and freeze. When cooked, these fries will crisp up and turn golden brown.

While frying, shake the pan of potatoes (or the fry basket) occasionally to allow even cooking. Cook until they are crisp and golden. Remove with a slotted spoon or drain the fryer basket well against the side of the fryer. Place French fries on paper towel to absorb excess oil before serving. Sprinkle with salt.

Roasting

For soft, fluffy roasted potatoes, you need to use large Idaho® russet potatoes. Peel and cut into even-size pieces (you can roast potatoes in their skins, but you won't get the crunchy result most people love). Blanch for 5 minutes in water, then leave in the cooling water for a further 5 minutes to par-cook evenly. Drain well and return to the pan to dry off completely. Well-drained potatoes with roughened surfaces produce the crispiest results.

A successful roasted potato also depends on the oil and the temperature. Beef drippings give the best flavor, although goose fat is delicious too and gives a very light, crisp result. With other roasts you can use lard or, where possible, drain off enough dripping from the meat. A vegetarian alternative is a light olive oil, or olive and sunflower oils.

The oil must be hot enough to seal the potato surfaces immediately. Use a large roasting pan so that you have room to turn the potatoes at least once.

1. Peel the potatoes and cut them into even-size pieces. Blanch the peeled chunks of potato in water and drain, then shake in the pan or fork over the surfaces to roughen them up.
2. Pour a shallow layer of your chosen oil into a good heavy roasting pan and place it in the oven, heating it to a temperature of 425°F. Add the dry potatoes and toss immediately in the hot oil.
3. Return to the top shelf of the oven and roast for up to one hour. Remove the roasting pan from the oven and, using a spatula, turn the potatoes over once or twice while roasting to coat evenly them in oil.



Baking

One of the most healthful, comforting and economical meals is an Idaho russet potato baked in its skin with a fluffy center topped with melted butter, sour cream, or cheese. Use a 10- to 12-oz. russet potato for a good size portion. Cook in the middle of a hot oven at 400°F for 1 hour for very large potatoes or 40–60 minutes for medium potatoes. To test that they are cooked, squeeze the sides to make sure that they are soft or use a fork to pierce the potato to in the middle. The potato is done when a temperature of 210°F is reached in the center.



1. Wash and dry baking potatoes thoroughly, then optionally rub with oil and add a generous sprinkling of salt. Cook on a baking tray. To speed up cooking time and to ensure even cooking throughout, cook the baking potatoes on skewers, on special potato baking racks, or directly on the oven racks.
2. When tender, pierce a cross in the top of each potato with a fork and set the tray aside to cool slightly.
3. Hold each hot potato in a clean cloth and squeeze gently from underneath to open up.
4. Place the open potatoes on individual serving plates and put a pat of butter in each one. For a quick topping, add a little grated hard cheese, or a dollop of sour cream and chopped fresh herbs, such as chives or parsley. Season well.

Potato Skins

Deep fry or brush the potatoes at 400°F for 1-1½ hours for large potatoes and 40–60 minutes for medium. Cut in half lengthwise and scoop out the soft centers. (Mash the insides for a dinner side dish).

Brush the skins inside and out with melted butter or a mixture of butter and oil and return to top shelf of oven.

Bake at 400°F for 20 minutes or until the skins are beautifully crisp and golden brown. For deep frying, omit brushing with butter or oil and deep fry until golden brown. Fill with toppings such as shredded cheese and bacon bits and return to oven to melt.



Microwaving

Baking potatoes in the microwave is a big time-saver. Small potatoes and potato pieces can also be cooked very quickly and easily. Always cut or prick the potato skins first, to prevent bursting. To bake, allow 4–8 minutes for each potato, with the setting on high, increasing by 2–4 minutes for every additional



potato. Place large potatoes in a circle on parchment or a paper towel on the microwave tray. Turn once during the cooking process. Place small potatoes in a microwave-safe bowl with 2–3 Tbsp boiling water. Cover tightly with microwave film and pierce the film two or three times to allow steam to escape during cooking.

Alternatively, cover the potatoes with a close-fitting microwave lid. Leave for 3–5 minutes before draining, adding a few pieces of butter and seasoning.

Mashing

The best mashers are those that have a strong but open cutting grid that is not too fine (or a potato ricer).

Simply push down on the cooked potatoes, making sure you cover every area in the pan, and you will get a smooth, yet slightly textured result. Do not overmix, as the potatoes will turn gluey.



For light and fluffy mashed potatoes, press through a potato ricer.

Add plenty of butter, some cream or milk and seasoning to taste, then continue mashing the potatoes until you have a creamy, fluffy mixture.

Set the bowl over a pan with hot water to keep warm.



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with Idaho® Fingerlings recipe.





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