



## Zion Farmers Market Veg-u-cation

### Terrifically Tasty Tubers



The potato, from the perennial *Solanum tuberosum*, is the world's fourth largest food crop, following rice, wheat, and maize. The Inca Indians in Peru were the first to cultivate potatoes around 8,000 BC to 5,000 B.C.

In 1536 Spanish Conquistadors conquered Peru, discovered the flavors of the potato, and carried them to Europe. Before the end of the sixteenth century, families of Basque sailors began to cultivate potatoes along the Biscay coast of northern Spain. Sir Walter Raleigh introduced potatoes to Ireland in 1589 on the 40,000 acres of land near Cork. It took nearly four decades for the potato to spread to the rest of Europe.

Eventually, agriculturalists in Europe found potatoes easier to grow and cultivate than other staple crops, such as wheat and oats. Most importantly, it became known that potatoes contained most of the vitamins needed for sustenance, and they could be provided to nearly 10 people for each acre of land cultivated.

In the 1840s a major outbreak of potato blight, a plant disease, swept through Europe, wiping out the potato crop in many countries. The Irish working class lived largely on potatoes and when the blight reached Ireland, their main staple food disappeared. This famine left many poverty-stricken families with no choice but to struggle to survive or emigrate out of Ireland. Over the course of the famine, almost one million people died from starvation or disease. Another one million people left Ireland, mostly for Canada and the United States.

### **Potatoes in the United States**

Potatoes arrived in the Colonies in 1621 when the Governor of Bermuda, Nathaniel Butler, sent two large cedar chests containing potatoes and other vegetables to Governor Francis Wyatt of Virginia at Jamestown. The first permanent potato patches in North America were established in 1719, most likely near Londonderry (Derry), NH, by Scotch-Irish immigrants. From there, the crop spread across the country.

Idaho, the present-day largest producer of potatoes, actually did not begin growing potatoes until 1836, when missionaries moved west in an effort to teach the native tribes to grow crops instead of relying upon hunting and gathering methods. However, it wasn't until 1872 when the Russet Burbank variety was developed, that the Idaho potato industry began to flourish.

A. Parmentier helped King Louis XIV popularize the potato in France in the 18th century. Parmentier created a feast with only potato dishes, a concept he realized was possible when he was imprisoned in Germany and fed only potatoes. Benjamin Franklin, ambassador to France, was in attendance of Parmentier's feast in 1767.

**French Fries** were introduced to the U.S. when Thomas Jefferson served them in the White House during his Presidency of 1801-1809. Collinet, chef for French King Louis Phillippe (reign 1830-1848) unintentionally created **soufflés** (or puffed) potatoes by plunging already fried potatoes into extremely hot oil to reheat them when the King arrived late for dinner one night. To the chef's surprise and the king's delight, the potatoes puffed up like little balloons. In 1853 railroad magnate Commodore Cornelius Vanderbilt complained that his potatoes were cut too thick and sent them back to the kitchen at a fashionable resort in Saratoga Springs, NY. To spite his haughty guest, Chef George Crum sliced some potatoes paper thin, fried them in hot oil, salted and served them. To everyone's surprise, Vanderbilt loved his "Saratoga Crunch Chips," and **potato chips** have been popular ever since.

### **Buying**

Look for clean, smooth, firm-textured potatoes with no cuts, bruises or discoloration.

### **Proper Storage**

- Store potatoes in a cool, well ventilated place.
- Colder temperatures lower than 50 degrees, such as in the refrigerator, cause a potato's starch to convert to sugar, resulting in a sweet taste and discoloration when cooked. If you do refrigerate, letting the potato warm gradually to room temperature before cooking can reduce the discoloration.
- Avoid areas that reach high temperatures (beneath the sink or beside large appliances) or receive too much sunlight (on the countertop).
- Perforated plastic bags and paper bags offer the best environment for extending shelf-life
- Keep potatoes out of the light.
- Don't wash potatoes (or any produce, for that matter) before storing. Dampness promotes early spoilage.

### **"Green" or sprouting potatoes**

- Green on the skin of a potato is the build-up of a chemical called Solanine. It is a natural reaction to the potato being exposed to too much light. Solanine produces a bitter taste and if eaten in large quantity can cause illness.
- If there is slight greening, cut away the green portions of the potato skin before cooking and eating.
- Sprouts are a sign that the potato is trying to grow. Storing potatoes in a cool, dry, dark location that is well ventilated will reduce sprouting.
- Cut the sprouts away before cooking or eating the potato.



### ***Russet Potatoes***



**Appearance:** medium to large, oblong or slightly flattened oval, light to medium russet-brown, netted skin, white to pale yellow flesh.

**Texture:** floury, dry; light and fluffy; hearty skin that is chewy when cooked.

**Flavor:** mild; earthy; medium sugar content

**Preferred uses:** baking, frying, mashing, roasted

Russet potatoes are the most popular type of potato. Russets are ideal for light and fluffy mashed potatoes. They also fry up crisp and golden brown, and they are the potato of choice for baking. The delicate flavor and fluffy texture of baked russets go well with all kinds of toppings, from traditional sour cream and chives to spicy and bold Mediterranean or Latin flavors. Try cutting into planks or wedges to make hearty oven-roasted "fries."

### ***Red Potatoes***



**Appearance:** small to medium; round or slightly oblong; smooth, thin red skin; white flesh

**Texture:** waxy, moist and smooth; creamy

**Flavor:** Subtly sweet; mild medium sugar content

**Preferred uses:** Roasting, mashing, salads, soups/stews

Because of their waxy texture, the flesh of red potatoes stays firm throughout the cooking process, whether they are being roasted or cooked in a stew. Their thin yet vibrant red skin adds appealing color and texture to side dishes and salads. Reds are frequently used to make tender yet firm potato salad or add pizzazz to soups and stews, as well as being served baked or mashed. Round reds are often referred to as "new potatoes," but the term "new" technically refers to any type of potato that is harvested before reaching maturity.

### ***White Potatoes***



**Appearance:** small to medium; round to long shape; white or tan skin; white flesh

**Texture:** medium starch; slightly creamy, slightly dense; thin, delicate skin

**Flavor:** subtly sweet; mild; low sugar content

**Preferred uses:** mashing, salads, steaming/boiling, frying

White potatoes hold their shape well after cooking. Their delicate, thin skins add just the right amount of texture to a velvety mashed potato dish without the need for peeling. Grilling whites brings out a more full-bodied flavor. Create signature potato salads—just toss cooked white potatoes with dressings and ingredients “borrowed” from other salads, e.g., Caesar dressing and grated Parmesan; or ranch dressing, chopped egg and bacon crumbles.

### ***Yellow Potatoes***



**Appearance:** marble to large size; round or oblong shape; light tan to golden skin; yellow to golden flesh.

**Texture:** slightly waxy, velvety, moist

**Flavor:** subtly sweet; rich; buttery; medium-sugar content

**Preferred uses:** grilling, roasting, mashing, salads

Grilling gives yellow potatoes a crispy skin that enhances the dense flesh, creating a slightly sweet caramelized flavor. The creamy texture and golden color of yellow potatoes mean you can use less or no butter for lighter, healthier dishes. The naturally smooth and buttery texture also lends itself well to lighter versions of baked, roasted or mashed potatoes. Simmer yellow potatoes until fully cooked, then drain, chill, and gently “smash” into flat disks. Brown these in oil or clarified butter and serve as a side or appetizer topped with sour cream and chives or other garnishes.

### ***Purple/Blue Potatoes***



**Appearance:** small to medium-size; oblong to fingerling; deep purple, blue or slightly red skin; blue, purple lavender, pink or white flesh

**Texture:** moist; firm flesh. Note—all blue and purple Peruvian varieties have higher starch content and a floury texture

**Flavor:** earthy, nutty, low sugar content

**Preferred Uses:** roasting, grilling, salads, baking

Most blue/purple potatoes have moist, firm flesh that retains its shape while adding rich, vibrant color and luscious taste to salads. The purple color is preserved best by microwaving, but steaming and baking are also great ways to cook blue/purple potatoes. Because of their mild yet distinctly nutty flavor, blue/purple potatoes naturally complement green salad flavors. Red, White and Blues—Combine blue potatoes with whites and reds in salads or roasted medleys to make all three colors “pop”.

## ***Fingerling Potatoes***



**Appearance:** 2-4 inches long; finger-shaped or oblong; red, orange, purple or white skin; red orange, purple, yellow or white flesh—sometimes streaked with veins of color.

**Texture:** waxy, firm, dry

**Flavor:** buttery; nutty; earthy; medium sugar content

**Preferred uses:** Pan-frying, roasting, salads

Fingerling color and shape are a welcome visual addition to any dish. Pan-frying and roasting enhance their robust flavor and showcase their wonderful nutty or buttery tastes. Consider fingerlings as a change-of-pace foundation for a unique potato salad. Split fingerlings lengthwise and oven-roast to serve as a small-plate or side-dish alternative to fries, with a flavor dipping sauce, like spicy ketchup, romesco, or sriracha mayo.

## ***Petite Potatoes***



These small, bite-sized potatoes are actually a grade standard based upon size ("C-size" and smaller, oftentimes referred to as pearls or marble-size). They are the same skin and flesh color as their larger-sized cousins, as well as the shape, texture and sugar content. Their flavor profile is similar but with a more concentrated flavor to their larger-sized cousins.

**Preferred uses:** salads, roasting, frying

Petites make a great substitute for pasta, adding nutritional value as well. Roast a combination of colors for an eye-catching side dish. Their concentrated flavors and quicker cooking time makes petites a good choice for potato salads. Simply toss petites in olive oil, rosemary and salt and pepper to make colorful, delicious and fun roasted potatoes. They save you prep time, because they can be prepared and served whole, without slicing or chopping.



## **Best Way to Cook Potatoes**

There are a number of different ways to prepare potatoes, among them baking, boiling and steaming. Find below instructions on a few of the most popular ways to cook a potato.

### ***Preparing Potatoes for Cooking***

Gently scrub potato with a vegetable brush under cool running water. Most nutrients are preserved when potatoes are cooked and eaten with the skin on. If peeling, use a vegetable peeler or sharp paring knife and keep the peeling very thin, since many of the nutrients are found close to the skin.

Sometimes potatoes that are cut and uncooked take on a pinkish or brownish discoloration. It's due to the carbohydrate in the food reacting with oxygen in the air. Potatoes that become discolored are safe to eat and do not need to be thrown out. The color usually disappears with cooking.

Preserve the color of cut potatoes by storing them in cold water, and add lemon juice or a little vinegar. Limit water soaking to two hours to retain water-soluble vitamins.

## **Instructions for How to Cook a Potato**

### ***Baked Potatoes – Learn How to Bake a Potato***

The perfect baked potato is crispy on the outside and fluffy in the middle. Baking potatoes is simple. To make a baked potato, simply wash your favorite type of potato, we recommend the russet potato because of its flavor and texture. Preheat your oven to 400 degrees, many people choose to poke a few holes into the potato with a fork or knife. This is not necessary for baked potatoes. After washing, rub your potatoes with olive oil, sprinkle with salt and pepper and wrap in folie to prevent your baked potato from drying out. For potatoes about the size of your fist, cook for one hour. If larger, add more time. For smaller potatoes, reduce the time a bit.

### ***Boiling Potatoes – Learn How to Boil Potatoes***

Don't know how to boil a potato? Boiling potatoes is easy. Popular potato dishes from potato salad for a summer cookout to mashed potatoes for the holidays start with, you guessed it, boiling a pot of potatoes. Whether you're boiling your first potato for tonight's dinner or wonder if you've been boiling potatoes correctly, here's a step-by-step guide showing you exactly how to boil potatoes.



### ***What Potatoes Should be Used for the Boiling Cooking Method?***

Potatoes that have a waxy skin, such as **red, golden or purple potatoes are the best types of potatoes for boiling.** They hold their shape when boiled and have a nice creamy texture once cooked. They are also usually smaller than your fist and thin-skinned, so they cook more quickly. Russet potatoes are often used for boiling when making mashed potatoes.

### ***Steaming Potatoes – Learn How to Steam a Potato***

Keep in mind, to preserve the abundance of nutrients in your potato, cook them **in their skins**. Steam or microwave your potatoes, instead of boiling, as water naturally leaches some of the nutrients from food cooked in it. If you do boil potatoes, consider using that water to moisten your mashed potatoes or in soup. Want to know how to roast potatoes? It's simple. Preheat oven to 450 degrees F, place quartered potatoes, we recommend red potatoes, in a (cool) roasting pan, drizzle spuds with approximately two tablespoons of vegetable oil, add 1 teaspoon of salt and 1/2 teaspoon of ground black pepper and, if desired, 1 teaspoon dried rosemary (crushed). Stir all ingredients to coat spuds and place in oven for 20 minutes. Yum! You're done.

### **Leftovers?**

Refrigerate any leftovers within two hours of serving to prevent food-borne illnesses. Any meal leftovers should be consumed within a few days. We don't recommend freezing cooked potatoes at home as they become watery upon reheating. The potato is 80 percent water; and when frozen, this water separates from the starch and nutrients.



### ***Did you know...***

- During the Alaskan Klondike gold rush, (1897-1898) potatoes were practically worth their weight in gold. Potatoes were valued for their vitamin C. And gold, at that time, was more plentiful than nutritious foods!
- In October 1995, the potato became the first vegetable to be grown in space. NASA and the University of Wisconsin, Madison, created the technology with the goal of feeding astronauts on long space voyages, and eventually, feeding future space colonies.
- Today potatoes are grown in all 50 states of the USA and in about 125 countries throughout the world.
- The sweet potato belongs in the same family as morning glories while the white potato belongs to the same group as tomatoes, tobacco, chile pepper, eggplant and the petunia.
- The potato is about 80% water and 20% solids.
- An 8 ounce baked or boiled potato has only about 100 calories.
- The average American eats about 124 pounds of potatoes per year while Germans eat about twice as much.
- In 1974, an Englishman named Eric Jenkins grew 370 pounds of potatoes from one plant.
- Thomas Jefferson gets the credit for introducing "french fries" to America when he served them at a White House dinner.

- According to the Guinness Book of World Records, the largest potato grown was 7 pounds 1 ounce by J. East (1953) and J. Busby (1982) of Great Britain.
- The world's largest potato chip crisp (on exhibit at the Potato Museum) was produced by the Pringle's Company in Jackson, TN, in 1990. It measures 23" x 14.5".
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- Potato blossoms used to be a big hit in royal fashion. Potatoes first became fashionable when Marie Antoinette paraded through the French countryside wearing potato blossoms in her hair.

***The Incas had many uses for potatoes other than dinner:***

- Placed raw slices on broken bones to promote healing
- Carried them to prevent rheumatism
- Ate with other foods to prevent indigestion.
- Measured time: by correlating units of time by how long it took for potatoes to cook.
- Various folk remedies recommend using potatoes:
- Treat facial blemishes by washing you face daily with cool potato juice.
- Treat frostbite or sunburn by applying raw grated potato or potato juice to the affected area.
- Help a toothache by carrying a potato in your pocket.
- Ease a sore throat by putting a slice of baked potato in a stocking and tying it around your throat.
- Ease aches and pains by rubbing the affected area with the water potatoes have been boiled in

