

COOKING SKILLS

Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1

Choosing the right potato, then boiling, mashing, roasting, chips, baking, frying, gratins, soups and salads.

9 Chapters | Philip Osztromok | Generated with Claude

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Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1

Chapter 1 · Know Your Potatoes and Boiling

SKILL GOAL

Choose the right potato for the job, and boil, steam and dress it properly.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Not all potatoes are the same. The key difference is **starch**. A floury potato is full of starch, so it goes fluffy and falls apart when boiled; a waxy potato has less, so it stays firm. Using the wrong type is behind most potato disasters, such as watery mash or salad that turns to mush.

TYPE	STARCH AND TEXTURE	BEST FOR	EXAMPLES (UK)
Floury	High starch, dry, fluffy, breaks up when boiled	Mash, roast, baked, chips, gnocchi	Maris Piper, King Edward, Russet, Rooster
Waxy	Low starch, firm and moist, holds its shape	Boiling, salads, gratins, sauté	Charlotte, Jersey Royal, Anya, new potatoes
All-rounder	Somewhere between	Almost anything, a safe default	Desiree, Estima, Marfona, Wilja

Packets often only say 'white potatoes' or 'baking potatoes'. Look for the variety name; if there isn't one, 'baking' usually means floury, and 'salad' or 'new' means waxy. A bag of all-rounders will manage most things.

The rules for boiling

- **Start in cold water,** salted, so the potato cooks through evenly.
- **Cut to the same size** so all the pieces finish together.
- **Simmer, don't boil hard.** A rolling boil knocks the outsides to mush before the middle is cooked.

- **Test with a knife,** not the clock. Timings vary with the potato.
- **Drain and steam dry** for a couple of minutes. Wet potatoes make wet mash and sad roasties.
- **Boiling whole with the skin on** keeps in more flavour and nutrients, and the skin peels off easily afterwards.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Boiled new potatoes with butter and mint

25 minutes | 1 portion | the baseline for every boiling test

The simplest potato dish, and the one to get right first. Waxy potatoes hold their shape, so they are hard to ruin.

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

250 g	new or waxy potatoes (e.g. Charlotte, Jersey Royal), scrubbed
1 tsp	salt, for the water
10 g	butter
1 tbsp	chopped mint (or parsley)

1. Cut the potatoes into pieces of roughly equal size (halve large ones). Leave the skins on.
2. Put them in a pan, cover with **cold** water by 2 cm and add the salt. Bring to the boil, then lower to a gentle simmer.
3. Cook for **12 to 15 minutes**, until a knife slides in with no resistance but the potato does not fall apart.
4. Drain, let them steam dry for 2 minutes in the colander, then toss with the butter and mint.

> **START IN COLD WATER**
>
> Starting from cold lets the heat reach the middle as the outside cooks, so you don't get a mushy outside and a hard centre.

LEVEL 1 · GENTLE

Steamed potatoes with chive yoghurt

30 minutes | 1 portion | no water to soak into the potato

Steaming keeps the potatoes out of the water, so they taste more of potato and stay fluffier. A lighter way to serve them.

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

250 g	waxy or all-rounder potatoes, cut into even chunks
1 tbsp	plain yoghurt
1 tbsp	chopped chives
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Put 3 cm of water in a pan and bring it to the boil. Set a steamer basket or a colander over it, so the potatoes sit above the water.
2. Add the potatoes, cover tightly, and steam for **18 to 22 minutes**, until a knife slides in easily. Top up the water if it runs low.
3. Mix the yoghurt, chives and seasoning. Spoon over the hot potatoes.

LEVEL 2 · RUSTIC

Crushed potatoes with olive oil and lemon

30 minutes | 1 to 2 portions | boiled, then squashed to take up the oil

Boil small waxy potatoes, squash each one flat with a fork, and dress them while hot. The cracked surfaces soak up the oil.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

300 g	small waxy potatoes (new potatoes), scrubbed
1 tsp	salt, for the water
2 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil
½	lemon, zest and a squeeze of juice
1 tbsp	chopped parsley
1 pinch	flaky salt and pepper

1. Boil the potatoes whole in salted water, from cold, for **15 to 18 minutes** until completely tender. Drain and steam dry for 2 minutes.
2. Put them on a plate or board, and press each one with the back of a fork until it splits and flattens.
3. Drizzle with the olive oil, lemon zest and juice, and scatter over the parsley and flaky salt. Eat warm.

> **A CRISPER VERSION**
>
> In chapter 3 you can finish these under a hot grill for 5 minutes for crisp edges.

LEVEL 2 · DRESSING

Warm potatoes in mustard vinaigrette

30 minutes | 2 portions | the first dressing, which warm potatoes drink up

Potatoes absorb a dressing best while hot. Mixing it with warm potatoes gives far more flavour than pouring it over cold ones (the experiment below proves it).

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

300 g	waxy potatoes, cut into 2 cm chunks
1 tsp	salt, for the water
1 tbsp	olive oil
1 tbsp	white wine vinegar or lemon juice
1 tsp	wholegrain mustard
2	spring onions, sliced
1 tbsp	chopped parsley
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Boil the potatoes from cold in salted water for **10 to 12 minutes**, until just tender. Drain.
2. Meanwhile whisk the oil, vinegar, mustard and seasoning in a bowl.
3. Tip the hot potatoes into the dressing, add the spring onions and parsley and fold gently. Eat warm or at room temperature.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Cold or hot start

Does it matter?

1. Cut 400 g of potatoes into 3 cm chunks and split into two pans. Start one in cold water and the other in already boiling water, both salted and simmered gently.
2. Test both with a knife every 3 minutes and compare the edges and the middles.

Look for: The hot-start chunks are usually softer or breaking on the outside while the middle is still firm. The cold start cooks more evenly.

EXPERIMENT

Skin on or peeled

Where does the flavour go?

1. Boil two equal batches of potatoes, one peeled and one in their skins, in the same amount of water.
2. Weigh them before and after cooking, and taste both plain.

Look for: The skin-on potatoes are less waterlogged and taste more of potato. The peeled ones soak up water. (Peel waxy potatoes after boiling if you prefer.)

EXPERIMENT

Whole or cut

Size and sogginess.

1. Boil a few whole small potatoes and the same weight cut into 2 cm pieces.
2. Compare the cooking times and the texture.

Look for: The cut pieces cook in half the time but take up more water and break more easily.

EXPERIMENT

Salted or unsalted water

Season the water?

1. Boil two batches, one with 1 teaspoon of salt per litre and one with none.
2. Taste both plain.

Look for: The salted potato tastes seasoned all the way through. Salting after the cooking only seasons the surface.

EXPERIMENT

Warm or cold dressing

When to dress a salad.

1. Make the vinaigrette from the last recipe. Toss half the boiled potatoes in it while hot and half after they have cooled.
2. Taste after 30 minutes.

Look for: The warm-dressed potatoes soak up the dressing and taste of it all the way through. The cold-dressed ones taste of potato with dressing outside.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Boiled new potatoes				
Steamed potatoes				
Crushed potatoes				
Warm vinaigrette potatoes				
Cold vs hot start				
Skin on vs peeled				

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Whole vs cut				
Salted vs unsalted				
Warm vs cold dressing				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Potatoes fall apart	Floury type, or boiled too hard or too long	Use waxy potatoes for boiling; simmer; test early
Hard in the middle	Pieces too big or uneven, or hot start	Cut evenly; start from cold
Watery or bland	Not salted, or left to stand in water	Salt the water; drain at once and steam dry
Grey or dark	Peeled and left to stand	Keep peeled potatoes under cold water until cooking
Green patches or bitter taste	Light exposure when stored	Cut away green; throw away if green all over
Waterlogged salad	Dressed when cold, or cooked too long	Cook until just tender and dress while warm

FOOD SAFETY: STORING POTATOES

Raw potatoes: keep them somewhere cool, dark and dry (above about 6°C), not in the fridge and not in the light. The Food Standards Agency advises against keeping raw potatoes in the fridge if you will roast or fry them, because the cold raises the amount of acrylamide that forms when they brown. Light turns the skin green and makes sprouts, and the green and the sprouts contain a natural toxin (solanine) that is bitter and can upset your stomach. Cut away sprouts and any green patches generously; if a potato is green all over, or tastes bitter, throw it away. Cooking does not remove it.

Cooked potatoes: cool them quickly (spread out, within 1 to 2 hours), keep them covered in the fridge, and eat them within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once. (This is the general chilled-leftovers advice relayed by local-authority food-safety pages; unlike rice,

potatoes have no special rule of their own, but they are starchy, so they are treated with the same care.)

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can tell floury from waxy potatoes.
- ☐ I can boil potatoes evenly and drain them well.
- ☐ I know why I start in cold water and salt it.
- ☐ I can steam potatoes and crush them.
- ☐ I know how to store potatoes safely.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1, chapter 2 is Mashed Potato: smooth, fluffy mash without glue, plus champ and colcannon.

Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1

Chapter 2 · Mashed Potato

SKILL GOAL

Make mashed potato that is fluffy, not watery or gluey.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Mash is one of the best-loved dishes, but it is easy to get wrong in two opposite ways: **watery and lumpy**, or **gluey and stretchy**. Both come from how you handle the starch.

FAULT	WHY	FIX
Watery	Potatoes waterlogged or not dried	Cut in big chunks, drain well, steam-dry in the pan
Gluey	Starch cells broken open by too much force (blender, food processor)	Use a masher or ricer, and stop when smooth
Lumpy	Not cooked enough, or mashed cold	Cook until a knife meets no resistance; mash while hot
Stodgy	Cold milk or butter	Warm the milk, and add the butter hot
Bland	Water unsalted, or seasoning too light	Salt the water; season the mash at the end

- **Floury potatoes** (Maris Piper, King Edward) give the fluffiest mash. All-rounders work. Waxy potatoes go gluey.
- **Mash while hot.** Cold potato goes gluey.
- **A ricer is the best tool,** a masher is fine, and never a blender or food processor.
- **Butter then milk,** warm, a little at a time.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Classic butter mash

30 minutes | 1 to 2 portions | the one to master

Floury potatoes, cooked until soft, dried, mashed while hot, then butter and warm milk folded in. The drying step is what separates fluffy from watery.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

300 g	floury potatoes (e.g. Maris Piper), peeled and cut into 4 cm chunks
1 tsp	salt, for the water
20 g	butter, diced
50 ml	whole milk, warmed
1 pinch	salt and white or black pepper

1. Put the potatoes in a pan, cover with cold water, add the salt and bring to the boil. Simmer for **15 to 20 minutes** until a knife slides in with no resistance.
2. Drain well and return them to the dry hot pan over a low heat for **1 to 2 minutes**, shaking, so the steam escapes.
3. Mash with a masher or push through a ricer, **while hot**, until there are no lumps.
4. Beat in the butter, then the warm milk a little at a time, until it is smooth and holds a soft peak. Season to taste.

> **WARM THE MILK**
>
> Cold milk cools the potato and makes it stodgy. Warm it in the microwave or a small pan first.

LEVEL 1 · LIGHTER

Olive oil and garlic mash

35 minutes | 1 to 2 portions | no dairy, and a lighter finish

A looser, silkier mash that uses olive oil in place of butter and milk. Boil the garlic with the potatoes so it turns mellow.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

300 g	floury potatoes, peeled and cut into 4 cm chunks
1 tsp	salt, for the water
2	garlic cloves, left whole in their skins
3 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil
2 tbsp	cooking water, kept back
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Boil the potatoes and garlic cloves together in salted water for **15 to 20 minutes** until tender. Scoop out 2 tablespoons of the cooking water, then drain and steam dry for 1 to 2 minutes.
2. Squeeze the soft garlic out of its skins into the potatoes and mash until smooth.
3. Beat in the oil a little at a time, loosening with the cooking water. Season well.

LEVEL 2 · IRISH

Champ (spring onion mash)

35 minutes | 2 portions | mash with a green, oniony kick

Champ is mash with spring onions softened in warm milk. Traditionally the butter is melted into a well in the middle, so each forkful picks up a little.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

300 g	floury potatoes, peeled and cut up
1 tsp	salt, for the water
4	spring onions, finely sliced
60 ml	whole milk
20 g	butter
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Boil the potatoes in salted water for 15 to 20 minutes until tender. Drain and steam dry.
2. Meanwhile, simmer the spring onions in the milk for 2 to 3 minutes until soft.
3. Mash the potatoes, then beat in the hot milk and spring onions until smooth. Season well.
4. Pile into a bowl, make a well in the middle and drop the butter in. Eat from the outside in, dipping each forkful into the butter.

LEVEL 2 · HEARTY

Colcannon (cabbage mash)

40 minutes | 2 portions | a cheap, filling supper

Mash with cabbage or kale folded in. The greens must be cooked and well drained, or they add water.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

300 g	floury potatoes, peeled and cut up
1 tsp	salt, for the water
100 g	green cabbage or kale, finely shredded
15 g	butter, plus a knob to serve
50 ml	whole milk, warmed
3	spring onions, sliced
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Boil the potatoes in salted water for 15 to 20 minutes until tender. Drain and steam dry.
2. Meanwhile, melt 15 g of butter in a pan, add the cabbage and spring onions and cook for **5 to 6 minutes**, stirring, until soft. Season.
3. Mash the potatoes with the warm milk until smooth. Fold in the cabbage mixture.
4. Serve with a knob of butter melting in the centre.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Floury or waxy

Same method, different potato.

1. Make butter mash with floury potatoes and again with waxy (new) potatoes, using the same method and amounts.
2. Compare the texture.

Look for: The floury mash is fluffy and light. The waxy mash is denser and can be sticky. Both can be nice, but they are different dishes.

EXPERIMENT

Masher, ricer or blender

The glue test.

1. Cook a batch of floury potatoes and divide into three. Mash one portion with a masher, push one through a ricer or sieve, and pulse one in a food processor for 30 seconds.
2. Add the same butter and milk to each and compare.

Look for: The processor mash turns into a gluey, elastic paste. The ricer is smoothest and the masher is slightly rougher. (Don't skip this one: it shows why you never blend mash.)

EXPERIMENT

Hot or cold milk

Warm your milk.

1. Make two small batches of mash. Add cold milk to one and warm milk to the other.
2. Compare how easily it mixes and how it eats.

Look for: The cold milk is harder to mix in and leaves the mash cooler and heavier.

EXPERIMENT

Steam-dry or not

Does drying matter?

1. Divide cooked potatoes in two. Mash one straight away after draining, and steam-dry the other for 2 minutes.
2. Add the same amount of butter and milk.

Look for: The undried mash is looser and takes less milk; the steam-dried mash is fluffier and richer.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Butter mash				
Olive oil and garlic mash				
Champ				
Colcannon				
Floury vs waxy				
Masher, ricer, blender				
Hot vs cold milk				
Steam-dried vs not				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Gluey, stretchy	Blended or overworked, or waxy potato	Use a masher or ricer; stop when smooth

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Watery	Not drained or dried	Return to the pan on a low heat and stir for a minute
Lumpy	Undercooked, or cold	Cook longer next time; mash while hot, or sieve
Bland	Unsalted water, too little seasoning	Salt the water; season to taste
Too stiff	Not enough milk or butter	Add warm milk a spoonful at a time
Too loose	Too much milk	Stir over a low heat to steam off the excess

FOOD SAFETY: LEFTOVER MASH

Cooked potatoes: cool them quickly (spread out, within 1 to 2 hours), keep them covered in the fridge, and eat them within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once. (This is the general chilled-leftovers advice relayed by local-authority food-safety pages; unlike rice, potatoes have no special rule of their own, but they are starchy, so they are treated with the same care.) Mash cools slowly in a deep bowl, so spread it out in a shallow dish. Mash freezes well in portions.

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can make smooth, fluffy mash from floury potatoes.
- ☐ I know to steam-dry and mash while hot.
- ☐ I know why a blender ruins mash.
- ☐ I can make mash without butter.
- ☐ I can make champ and colcannon.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1, chapter 3 is Roast Potatoes: a crisp shell and a fluffy middle.

Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1

Chapter 3 · Roast Potatoes

SKILL GOAL

Roast potatoes with a crisp golden shell and a fluffy middle.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

A good roast potato has a **crisp, golden shell** and a **fluffy middle**. Four things make that happen: the right potato (floury), a par-boil that roughs up the surface, very hot fat, and enough space on the tray.

STEP	WHAT IT DOES
Floury potato	Breaks down at the edges when par-boiled, making a fluffy layer that crisps
Par-boil	Softens the outside and gelatinises the starch
Steam-dry and shake	Removes moisture and roughs up the surface
Very hot fat	Seals the surface and starts the crisping at once
Space on the tray	Crowded potatoes steam instead of roasting
Turn only when needed	A crust forms when left alone; turning too early tears it

- **The oil should shimmer** before the potatoes go in.
- **One layer, with gaps.** Use two trays if you need to.
- **Pat dry.** Wet potatoes spit and steam.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Simple roast potatoes (no par-boil)

1 hour | 2 portions | the baseline: roast straight from raw

Raw potatoes straight into hot oil. They are crisp outside and firm inside, but denser than the par-boiled kind in the next recipe.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

400 g	floury or all-rounder potatoes, peeled and cut into 5 cm chunks
3 tbsp	sunflower or vegetable oil
1 pinch	flaky salt

1. Heat the oven to **200°C fan (220°C conventional, gas 7)**. Put a roasting tray with the oil in the oven for 10 minutes to get very hot.
2. Pat the potatoes dry. Carefully add them to the hot tray (they should sizzle), turn once to coat, and roast for 25 minutes.
3. Turn them, and roast for another 20 to 25 minutes, until **golden** and crisp, and a knife slides in easily.
4. Sprinkle with the salt and serve at once.

> **HOT FAT**
>
> A tray of hot oil can spit. Use oven gloves, add the potatoes away from your face, and never move a tray of hot fat while the oil is still very hot if you can avoid it.

LEVEL 2 · THE CLASSIC

Par-boiled, shaken roast potatoes

1 hour 15 minutes | 3 portions | the method behind crisp roasties

Par-boiling softens the outside, and shaking roughs up the surface into a fluffy layer. That rough layer is what crisps in the oil.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

600 g	floury potatoes (Maris Piper), peeled and cut into 5 cm chunks
1 tsp	salt, for the water
4 tbsp	sunflower or vegetable oil
1 tbsp	plain flour or fine semolina (optional)
1 pinch	flaky salt

1. Heat the oven to **200°C fan (220°C conventional, gas 7)** with the oil in a roasting tray inside.
2. Cover the potatoes with cold salted water, bring to the boil and simmer for **8 to 10 minutes**, until the outsides are soft but the centres are still firm.
3. Drain well, return to the dry pan, and leave to steam for 2 minutes. Put the lid on and **shake the pan firmly** a few times, until the edges are rough and fluffy. Sprinkle over the flour or semolina if you like and shake again.
4. Add the potatoes carefully to the hot oil, turn to coat, and roast for 30 minutes. Turn them and roast for 15 to 20 minutes more, until **golden and crisp**.
5. Season with flaky salt.

> **GO FOR GOLD**
>
> Golden yellow-brown is the target, not dark brown. See the food safety box below.

LEVEL 2 · FRAGRANT

Herb and garlic roast potatoes

1 hour 15 minutes | 3 portions | add the flavours late so they don't burn

The same method, with garlic and herbs added part-way through. If they go in at the start, they burn and turn bitter.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

600 g	floury potatoes, peeled and cut into 5 cm chunks
1 tsp	salt, for the water
4 tbsp	sunflower or olive oil
1 head	head of garlic, broken into unpeeled cloves
4	sprigs of rosemary or thyme
1 pinch	flaky salt

1. Par-boil, steam-dry and shake the potatoes as in the previous recipe, and put them into the hot oil.
2. Roast for **30 minutes**. Turn the potatoes, then add the garlic cloves and herbs to the tray.
3. Roast for another 15 to 20 minutes, until golden and crisp. Squeeze the soft garlic out of its skins over the potatoes.

LEVEL 1 · LIGHTER

Lighter olive oil roast potatoes

50 minutes | 2 portions | less fat, skin on

No par-boil, much less oil, and the skins left on. These are not as fluffy as a classic roastie, but they are quick and still crisp at the edges.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

500 g	waxy or all-rounder potatoes, unpeeled and halved or quartered
2 tbsp	olive oil
1 tsp	smoked paprika or dried oregano
1 pinch	salt and pepper
1	lemon, juice only

1. Heat the oven to 200°C fan (220°C conventional, gas 7) with a roasting tray inside.
2. Toss the potatoes with the oil, spice and seasoning in a bowl.
3. Spread them on the hot tray in a single layer, cut side down, and roast for **35 to 40 minutes**, turning once, until golden.
4. Squeeze over the lemon juice just before serving.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Par-boil time

How long is long enough?

1. Par-boil three batches of floury potatoes for 5, 10 and 15 minutes. Steam-dry, shake and roast all three together.
2. Compare crispness, fluffiness and any that have collapsed.

Look for: Five minutes gives a thin crust and a dense middle. Ten is the sweet spot. Fifteen can collapse and soak up fat.

EXPERIMENT

Which fat

Oil, butter or a mix?

1. Roast separate trays in sunflower oil, in olive oil, and in a mix of oil with a knob of butter added half-way through.
2. Taste each plain.

Look for: Neutral oil gives the crispest result; olive oil has a stronger taste, butter browns quickly and can burn if added early. Goose or duck fat, if you use it, gives a rich taste.

EXPERIMENT

Hot tray or cold tray

Does preheating matter?

1. Roast two batches, one added to a preheated tray of oil and one added to cold oil on a cold tray.
2. Compare the underside.

Look for: The cold-start potatoes are greasier and have a pale, soggy base; the hot ones sizzle and crisp.

EXPERIMENT

Shaken or smooth

Is the shaking worth it?

1. After par-boiling, shake half the potatoes in the pan to rough them up and leave the other half smooth.
2. Roast both.

Look for: The shaken ones have a craggy, extra-crisp crust. The smooth ones are paler and less crunchy.

EXPERIMENT

Temperature

Hotter or slower?

1. Roast one batch at 180°C fan and another at 210°C fan, adjusting the time until each is golden.

Look for: The lower oven takes longer and gives a paler potato; the hotter one gets crisp quickly but can go dark before the middle is done.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Simple roast				
Par-boiled roast				
Herb and garlic roast				
Lighter olive oil roast				
Par-boil 5, 10 and 15 min				
Oil, butter or mix				

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Hot vs cold tray				
Shaken vs smooth				
180 vs 210°C				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Pale and soggy	Fat not hot, tray crowded, or wet potatoes	Preheat the tray; use space; dry the potatoes
Hard in the middle	Too big, or par-boil too short	Cut smaller or par-boil a little longer
Collapsed or greasy	Par-boiled too long, or floury and old	Par-boil for 8 to 10 minutes
Stuck to the tray	Turned too early	Leave for 20 to 25 minutes before turning
Dark and bitter	Too hot, or garlic added early	Aim for golden; add garlic late
Not crisp the next day	Normal: roasties soften as they cool	Re-crisp in a hot oven for 10 minutes

FOOD SAFETY: HOT FAT AND ACRYLAMIDE

Go for gold. When starchy foods such as potatoes are fried, roasted or baked at high temperatures they form a chemical called acrylamide, which the Food Standards Agency says could raise cancer risk. Its advice is to cook to a **golden yellow, not dark brown**, and to follow the packet instructions on bought chips and roasties. A balanced diet matters more than any single food, so this is a nudge about colour, not a reason to avoid potatoes.

Hot fat is a burn and fire risk. Use oven gloves, keep children away from the oven, and never put water on a fat fire. **Raw potatoes:** keep them somewhere cool, dark and dry (above about 6°C), not in the fridge and not in the light. The Food Standards Agency advises against keeping raw potatoes in the fridge if you will roast or fry them, because the cold raises the amount of acrylamide that forms when they brown. Light turns the skin green and makes sprouts, and the green and the sprouts contain a natural toxin (solanine) that is bitter and can upset your stomach. Cut away sprouts and any green patches generously; if a potato is green all over, or tastes bitter, throw it away. Cooking does not remove it.

Cooked potatoes: cool them quickly (spread out, within 1 to 2 hours), keep them covered in the fridge, and eat them within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once. (This is the general chilled-leftovers advice relayed by local-authority food-safety pages; unlike rice, potatoes have no special rule of their own, but they are starchy, so they are treated with the same care.)

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can pick a floury potato for roasting.
- ☐ I can par-boil, steam-dry and shake potatoes.
- ☐ I know why the fat needs to be very hot.
- ☐ I can roast to golden, not dark brown.
- ☐ I can make roast potatoes without par-boiling.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1, chapter 4 is Chips, Wedges and Fries: cutting evenly and cooking twice.

Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1

Chapter 4 · Chips, Wedges and Fries

SKILL GOAL

Cut chips evenly and cook them to a crisp golden finish, in the oven, an air fryer or shallow oil.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Chips are about **surface area and starch**. A thin chip has a lot of crust and little middle, a thick one the opposite. The cooking is a balance between getting the middle soft and the outside crisp without browning too far.

STYLE	THICKNESS	METHOD	RESULT
Wedges	Thick, skin on	Oven, one cook	Soft middle, golden edge
Oven chips	About 1 cm	Soak, dry, hot oven	Crisp outside, light inside
Double-cooked chips	About 1.5 cm	Simmer, fry gently, fry hot	Crisp shell, fluffy middle
Fries	About 7 mm	Soak, dry, fry hot	Crisp throughout

- **Cut evenly.** Mixed thicknesses mean some burn while others stay raw.
- **Soak and dry.** Soaking removes surface starch that would burn. Drying matters more: water spits in oil and steams in the oven.
- **Floury potatoes** (Maris Piper) give the fluffiest chip.
- **Don't crowd.** A crowded tray or pan steams the chips and cools the oil.
- **An air fryer** works well for the oven recipes: use 1 tablespoon of oil, a single layer, and 15 to 20 minutes at 200°C, shaking half-way.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Oven wedges

45 minutes | 2 portions | the easiest chip-style potato

Wedges are forgiving: thick, skin on, no soaking and no frying.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	medium floury or all-rounder potatoes (about 400 g), scrubbed, skin on
1 tbsp	sunflower or olive oil
1 tsp	smoked paprika
1 pinch	salt

1. Heat the oven to **200°C fan (220°C conventional, gas 7)** and put a baking tray inside to heat.
2. Cut each potato lengthways into 8 wedges. Dry well. Toss with the oil, paprika and salt.
3. Spread on the hot tray, skin side down, with space between them. Roast for **30 to 35 minutes**, turning once, until **golden** and a knife slides in easily.

LEVEL 2 · CRISPER

Oven chips

1 hour | 2 portions | soaked and dried for a crisp edge

Chips are cut thinner than wedges, so they need soaking (to wash off surface starch), thorough drying and a hot tray.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

400 g	floury potatoes (Maris Piper), peeled
1½ tbsp	sunflower oil
1 pinch	salt

1. Cut the potatoes into chips about **1 cm thick and similar in length** (even sizes matter). Soak in a bowl of cold water for 30 minutes, then drain and **dry thoroughly** in a tea towel.
2. Heat the oven to 220°C fan (240°C conventional, gas 9) with a baking tray inside.
3. Toss the chips with the oil. Spread on the hot tray in a single layer with space between, and bake for **30 to 35 minutes**, turning once, until golden.
4. Season with salt.

> **GO FOR GOLD**
>
> Take them out when golden, not dark brown. Thin chips darken quickly in the last 5 minutes.

LEVEL 3 · THE BEST

Double-cooked chips

1 hour 15 minutes | 2 to 3 portions | soft inside, crisp outside, a treat

The restaurant method: simmer until tender, dry, fry gently to set the surface, then fry hot to crisp. The first cook makes the fluffy middle, the second the crisp outside.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

500 g	floury potatoes (Maris Piper), peeled and cut into 1.5 cm chips
1 tsp	salt, for the water
500 ml	sunflower or vegetable oil, for shallow frying (2 cm deep)
1 pinch	salt, to finish

1. Cover the chips with cold salted water, bring to the boil and simmer for **5 to 7 minutes**, until the edges are soft but they hold their shape. Drain carefully and spread on a rack or tray lined with kitchen paper. Let them steam dry for 10 minutes (you can chill them for up to a day).
2. Pour the oil into a heavy, deep pan **to no more than a third full** (2 cm deep is enough). Heat it to about 160°C, or until a cube of bread browns slowly.
3. Fry in 2 or 3 batches for **4 to 5 minutes**, until pale and set. Lift out onto kitchen paper. (This step can be done ahead.)
4. Heat the oil to about 190°C (a bread cube turns golden in 30 to 40 seconds). Fry the chips again for **2 to 3 minutes**, until **golden**. Drain on kitchen paper, season with salt and serve at once.
5. Let the oil cool completely before moving or disposing of it.

> **HOT OIL**
>
> Never leave hot oil unattended, never fill a pan more than a third full, and never use a deep chip pan. Keep a lid nearby; if the oil catches fire, **turn off the heat and cover with a lid or fire blanket. Never use water.** Dry the chips well, because water makes the oil spit.

LEVEL 2 · VARIATION

Sweet potato fries

45 minutes | 2 portions | they brown faster, so watch them

Sweet potatoes hold more sugar and water than ordinary potatoes, so they go limp and burn at the edges easily. Cornflour helps them crisp.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

300 g	sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into 1 cm sticks
1 tbsp	sunflower or olive oil
1 tsp	cornflour
½ tsp	paprika or cumin
1 pinch	salt

1. Heat the oven to 220°C fan (240°C conventional, gas 9) with a baking tray inside.
2. Dry the sticks very well. Toss with the cornflour, then the oil, spice and salt.
3. Spread on the hot tray in a single layer with space between them. Bake for **20 to 25 minutes**, turning once, until golden at the edges. Watch them closely for the last 5 minutes.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Soaked or unsoaked

Is soaking worth it?

1. Cut two batches of oven chips. Soak one for 30 minutes and dry it, and bake the other straight away.
2. Compare colour and crispness.

Look for: The soaked chips are paler, crisper and more even. Unsoaked ones brown faster at the edges and are slightly softer.

EXPERIMENT

Thick or thin

Choose your chip.

1. Cut chips at 7 mm, 1 cm and 2 cm. Bake them together and take each out when it is golden.
2. Compare the ratio of crust to fluffy middle.

Look for: The thin chips are crisp but dry, the thick ones are soft and fluffy with less crust. About 1 to 1.5 cm is the classic.

EXPERIMENT

One cook or two

Why the double cook?

1. Fry one batch of 1.5 cm chips once at 190°C until golden. Fry another using the full double-cooked method.
2. Compare the middles.

Look for: The single-cooked chips are crisp but the middles are dense or still firm. The double-cooked ones are fluffy.

EXPERIMENT

Oven or air fryer

Same chips, different machines.

1. Cook oven chips in the oven and in an air fryer, using the same chips and oil.
2. Compare time, crispness and washing up.

Look for: The air fryer is faster and often crisper with less oil, but only cooks a small batch at a time.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Oven wedges				
Oven chips				
Double-cooked chips				
Sweet potato fries				
Soaked vs unsoaked				
7 mm, 1 cm, 2 cm				
One cook vs two				
Oven vs air fryer				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Soggy chips	Wet, crowded, or oven not hot	Dry well; one layer; preheat the tray
Dark, bitter edges	Too hot or too long; surface starch	Soak; take out when golden
Hard in the middle	Too thick, or skipped the first cook	Cut thinner or double-cook
Chips stick to the tray	Not enough oil, or tray not hot	Preheat the tray; use enough oil
Oil spits	Chips wet	Dry thoroughly before frying
Sweet potato limp	Too wet or crowded	Dry, add cornflour, space them out

FOOD SAFETY: HOT OIL, ACRYLAMIDE AND STORAGE

Go for gold. When starchy foods such as potatoes are fried, roasted or baked at high temperatures they form a chemical called acrylamide, which the Food Standards Agency says could raise cancer risk. Its advice is to cook to a **golden yellow, not dark brown**, and to follow the packet instructions on bought chips and roasties. A balanced diet matters more than any single food, so this is a nudge about colour, not a reason to avoid potatoes.

Hot oil is the main danger in this chapter. Use a heavy deep pan filled to no more than a third, never leave it, and keep children and pets away. Dry the chips so they don't spit. If the oil catches fire,

turn off the heat and cover with a lid or fire blanket; **never use water**. Let the oil cool completely before moving it, and don't pour it down the sink.

Raw potatoes: keep them somewhere cool, dark and dry (above about 6°C), not in the fridge and not in the light. The Food Standards Agency advises against keeping raw potatoes in the fridge if you will roast or fry them, because the cold raises the amount of acrylamide that forms when they brown. Light turns the skin green and makes sprouts, and the green and the sprouts contain a natural toxin (solanine) that is bitter and can upset your stomach. Cut away sprouts and any green patches generously; if a potato is green all over, or tastes bitter, throw it away. Cooking does not remove it.

Cooked potatoes: cool them quickly (spread out, within 1 to 2 hours), keep them covered in the fridge, and eat them within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once. (This is the general chilled-leftovers advice relayed by local-authority food-safety pages; unlike rice, potatoes have no special rule of their own, but they are starchy, so they are treated with the same care.)

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can cut chips evenly, then soak and dry them.
- ☐ I can make wedges and oven chips.
- ☐ I know why chips are cooked twice.
- ☐ I can use hot oil safely.
- ☐ I can stop at golden, not dark brown.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1, chapter 5 is Baked Potatoes: a crisp skin and a light middle.

Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1

Chapter 5 · Baked Potatoes

SKILL GOAL

Bake a potato with a crisp skin and a light middle, and fill it.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

A baked potato is a lesson in doing less. Choose a large floury potato, dry it, prick it, and put it in a hot oven. What you are after is a **dry, crisp skin** and a **light, fluffy middle**.

CHOICE	RESULT
Floury potato (Maris Piper, Russet, King Edward)	Fluffy, dry middle
Waxy potato	Firm, moist and dense; not ideal for baking
Dry and prick	Lets steam escape so it doesn't burst or steam the skin
Oil and salt	Crisper, tastier skin
On the shelf, no foil	Dry heat gives crisp skin; foil steams it soft
Open as soon as it's out	Releases steam so the middle stays fluffy

- **Size matters.** Bake potatoes of the same size together.
- **It's done** when it feels soft when squeezed (with a glove or a cloth), and a skewer meets no resistance.
- **Eat the skin.** It's where much of the fibre is.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Jacket potato

1 hour 15 minutes | 1 portion | crisp skin, fluffy middle

Bake directly on the oven shelf, with no foil, for a skin you can crack. The potato is done when it gives under gentle pressure from an oven-gloved hand.

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

1	large baking potato (about 250 g), e.g. Maris Piper or Russet
1 tsp	olive or sunflower oil
1 pinch	coarse salt
10 g	butter

1. Heat the oven to **200°C fan (220°C conventional, gas 7)**.
2. Scrub the potato and **dry it well**. Prick it all over with a fork (this lets steam escape). Rub with the oil and salt.
3. Put it straight on the oven shelf (with a tray underneath to catch drips) and bake for **60 to 75 minutes**, until the skin is crisp and the potato gives when squeezed.
4. Cut a cross in the top, squeeze the sides to open it, and add the butter. Eat at once.

> **FASTER**
>
> Microwave the pricked potato for 5 minutes first, then finish in the oven for 25 to 30 minutes for a crisp skin.

LEVEL 2 · RICH

Twice-baked potatoes with cheese and spring onion

1 hour 45 minutes | 2 portions | scooped, mixed and baked again

Bake the potatoes, scoop out the middle, mix it with flavourings and pile it back into the skins for a second bake, which crisps the top.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

2	large baking potatoes
1 tsp	oil
50 g	mature Cheddar, grated
2	spring onions, sliced
2 tbsp	milk or plain yoghurt
10 g	butter
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Bake the potatoes as in the jacket potato recipe. Let them cool for 10 minutes until you can hold them.
2. Cut each in half lengthways and scoop the flesh into a bowl, leaving a **1 cm wall** of potato in the skin.
3. Mash the flesh with the butter, milk, half the cheese, the spring onions and seasoning.
4. Pile back into the skins, scatter the remaining cheese on top, and bake at 200°C fan (220°C conventional, gas 7) for **15 to 20 minutes**, until golden and hot in the middle.

LEVEL 1 · FILLINGS

Loaded jackets: beans and cheese, tuna and sweetcorn

10 minutes plus the baking | 1 portion of each filling | the filling does the work

A baked potato is a base for almost anything. Two quick, filling toppings; use one per potato.

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

1	large baking potato, baked
100 g	baked beans
30 g	Cheddar, grated
1 tin	tuna in water (100 g drained), for the second filling
2 tbsp	sweetcorn
1 tbsp	plain yoghurt
1 pinch	pepper

1. Bake the potato (see the first recipe) and cut it open.
2. **Beans and cheese:** heat the beans in a small pan or in the microwave until steaming hot. Pile on the potato and top with the cheese.
3. **Tuna and sweetcorn:** drain the tuna and mix with the sweetcorn, yoghurt and pepper. Spoon onto the hot potato.

> **LIGHTER FILLINGS**
>
> Cottage cheese, hummus, a spoon of plain yoghurt with chives, or chilli beans make lighter or vegetable-rich toppings.

LEVEL 2 · VARIATION

Baked sweet potato with yoghurt and chilli

50 minutes | 1 portion | quicker and sweeter

Sweet potatoes cook faster than ordinary potatoes and have a soft, sticky middle. The skin doesn't go as crisp.

INGREDIENTS (1 PORTION)

1	medium sweet potato (about 250 g)
1 tsp	oil
1 pinch	salt
2 tbsp	plain yoghurt
1 pinch	chilli flakes or paprika
1 tbsp	chopped coriander or parsley

1. Heat the oven to 200°C fan (220°C conventional, gas 7). Prick the sweet potato, rub with oil and salt, and put it on a tray (it may leak sugary juice).
2. Bake for **40 to 50 minutes**, until soft right through.
3. Split open and top with the yoghurt, chilli and herbs.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Pricked or not

Why prick?

1. Bake two potatoes, one pricked all over and one left whole. Put the unpricked one on a tray with a sheet of foil underneath in case it bursts.
2. Check them after an hour.

Look for: The pricked potato has a drier, fluffier middle. The unpricked one may split or burst in the oven, so stand back when you open the door.

EXPERIMENT

Oiled and salted or plain

Do the extras matter?

1. Bake one potato plain and one rubbed with oil and salt.
2. Compare the skins.

Look for: The oiled one is crisper and tastier. The plain one is drier and chewier, like a dry cracker.

EXPERIMENT

Foil or no foil

Does wrapping help?

1. Bake one potato wrapped in foil and one unwrapped. Unwrap the foiled one as soon as it comes out.
2. Compare the skins.

Look for: The foil one has a soft, steamed skin. The unwrapped one has a crisp one. Remove the foil as soon as it comes out of the oven (see the food safety box).

EXPERIMENT

Microwave start or oven only

Is the shortcut worth it?

1. Bake one potato in the oven only, and another after 5 minutes in the microwave, finished in the oven for 30 minutes.
2. Compare time and skin.

Look for: The microwave start saves 30 minutes. The skin is slightly less crisp than oven-only, but it's close.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Jacket potato				
Twice-baked				
Beans and cheese				
Tuna and sweetcorn				
Sweet potato				
Pricked vs not				
Oiled vs plain				
Foil vs no foil				
Microwave start				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Soggy skin	Foil, or a crowded oven	Bake on the shelf without foil

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Hard in the middle	Too big, or oven too cool	Bake longer; or microwave start
Skin burnt	Oven too hot or too high	Lower the shelf; check from 50 minutes
Potato exploded	Not pricked	Prick all over, always
Gluey middle	Waxy potato	Use a floury variety
Twice-baked collapses	Walls too thin	Leave a 1 cm wall of potato

FOOD SAFETY: BAKED POTATOES

Foil and baked potatoes: a cooked potato wrapped in foil and left to cool or keep warm at room temperature can let the bacterium that causes botulism grow, because foil shuts out air. Cases are rare but serious. Take the foil off as soon as the potato is baked, don't leave baked potatoes out for more than about 4 hours, and chill leftovers (unwrapped) in the fridge.

Go for gold. When starchy foods such as potatoes are fried, roasted or baked at high temperatures they form a chemical called acrylamide, which the Food Standards Agency says could raise cancer risk. Its advice is to cook to a **golden yellow, not dark brown**, and to follow the packet instructions on bought chips and roasties. A balanced diet matters more than any single food, so this is a nudge about colour, not a reason to avoid potatoes. Don't eat a baked potato with a blackened, burnt skin.

Tuna and cheese fillings are ready to eat, but fillings with mayonnaise or yoghurt must go back in the fridge after the meal. **Cooked potatoes:** cool them quickly (spread out, within 1 to 2 hours), keep them covered in the fridge, and eat them within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once. (This is the general chilled-leftovers advice relayed by local-authority food-safety pages; unlike rice, potatoes have no special rule of their own, but they are starchy, so they are treated with the same care.)

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

☐ I can bake a potato with a crisp skin and a fluffy middle.

☐ I know why I prick it and why I skip the foil.

☐ I can make twice-baked potatoes.

☐ I can make two quick fillings.

☐ I know the foil and botulism rule.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1, chapter 6 is Pan-Fried Potatoes: sauté potatoes, hash browns, rösti and Spanish potato tortilla.

Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1

Chapter 6 · Pan-Fried Potatoes

SKILL GOAL

Brown potatoes in a pan without sticking, burning or sogginess.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Frying potatoes in a pan is about **heat and patience**. The potato needs to be cooked through and have a crisp brown surface, and the pan doesn't give you much time. Most of the methods here cook the potato first, then brown it.

DISH	POTATO	COOK FIRST?	HEAT	KEY TRICK
Sauté potatoes	Waxy or all-rounder cubes	Par-boil 5 minutes	Medium-high	Dry, single layer, leave alone
Hash browns	Grated floury	No	Medium	Squeeze dry
Rösti	Grated floury	Optional	Medium	Press, and don't touch
Tortilla	Thin sliced waxy	Cooked gently in oil	Medium-low then medium	Don't brown; flip with a plate

- **A dry potato fries; a wet one steams.** Dry or squeeze everything.
- **Don't crowd the pan.** A single layer, with gaps, or in batches.
- **Leave it alone** until the base is golden. Moving potatoes too early tears the crust.
- **A good non-stick pan** is worth it for rösti and tortilla.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Sauté potatoes

35 minutes | 2 portions | par-boil first, then brown

Parboiling cooks the potato through, so the pan only has to brown the outside. It's the reliable way to get crisp edges with a soft middle.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

400 g	waxy or all-rounder potatoes, cut into 2 cm cubes
1 tsp	salt, for the water
2 tbsp	sunflower or olive oil
10 g	butter
1	garlic clove, crushed
1 tbsp	chopped parsley
1 pinch	flaky salt

1. Cover the potatoes with cold salted water, bring to the boil and simmer for **5 to 6 minutes**, until barely tender. Drain and **dry thoroughly**.
2. Heat the oil in a large non-stick or heavy frying pan over a medium-high heat. Add the potatoes in a **single layer**, and leave them alone for 4 to 5 minutes, until golden underneath.
3. Turn and cook for another 8 to 10 minutes, turning occasionally, until golden all over.
4. Add the butter and garlic for the last minute, then the parsley and flaky salt.

LEVEL 2 · BREAKFAST

Hash browns

35 minutes | 2 portions | squeeze out the water

Grated potato is mostly water and starch. Squeeze it dry and rinse away the surface starch for the crispest results.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

250 g	floury potatoes, peeled
½	small onion, grated (optional)
1 tbsp	plain flour
1 pinch	salt and pepper
2 tbsp	sunflower oil

1. Grate the potato on the coarse side of a grater. Rinse in a bowl of cold water, drain, and **squeeze as dry as you can in a clean tea towel**.
2. Mix the potato with the onion, flour and seasoning. Shape into 4 flat patties about 1 cm thick.
3. Heat the oil in a frying pan over a medium heat. Fry the patties for **5 to 6 minutes a side**, pressing lightly, until deep golden (not dark brown) and cooked through.
4. Drain on kitchen paper and serve straight away.

> **GO FOR GOLD**
>
> Grated potato browns fast. Keep the heat medium and aim for golden.

LEVEL 2 · SWISS

Rösti

40 minutes | 2 portions | one big crisp potato cake

Rösti is grated potato cooked as a single cake in a pan. Use a non-stick pan, medium heat, patience, and no peeking.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

300 g	floury or all-rounder potatoes, peeled
½ tsp	salt
2 tbsp	sunflower oil
10 g	butter

1. Grate the potatoes coarsely. Squeeze dry in a tea towel and mix with the salt.
2. Heat the oil and butter in a 20 cm non-stick pan over a medium heat. Add the potato, spread evenly and **press down firmly**.
3. Cook for **10 to 12 minutes** without moving it, until the base is deep golden. Slide it onto a plate, invert the pan over the plate and flip the rösti back in (use oven gloves).
4. Cook the other side for another 8 to 10 minutes. The middle should be tender when pierced.

> **PAR-BOILED VERSION**
>
> Par-boil the whole potatoes for 5 minutes, cool, then grate. The rösti is softer inside and cooks faster.

LEVEL 3 · SPANISH

Spanish potato tortilla

1 hour | 3 portions | potatoes cooked gently in oil, then set in eggs

A Spanish tortilla has potatoes softened in oil (not browned), then bound with egg and cooked into a thick omelette. This version is cooked until set all the way through.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

400 g	waxy or all-rounder potatoes, peeled and thinly sliced (3 mm)
1	onion, thinly sliced
100 ml	olive oil
5	Lion-marked eggs
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Heat the oil in a 24 cm non-stick pan over a medium-low heat. Add the potatoes and onion with a pinch of salt and cook gently for **15 to 20 minutes**, turning often, until tender but not browned.
2. Beat the eggs in a large bowl with salt and pepper. Strain the potatoes and onion in a sieve over a bowl (keep the oil), and fold them into the eggs. Leave for 5 minutes.
3. Return 1 tablespoon of oil to the pan over a medium heat. Pour in the mixture and cook for **5 to 6 minutes**, shaking the pan, until the base is set and golden.
4. Put a large plate over the pan, flip the pan over (use oven gloves, over the sink), then slide the tortilla back in, uncooked side down. Cook for **4 to 5 minutes** more, until set all the way through.
5. Rest for 5 minutes, then cut into wedges. Serve warm or at room temperature.

> **COOKED THROUGH**
>
> Traditional tortilla is left runny in the middle. Lion-marked eggs are safe to eat lightly cooked, but this recipe is cooked until set. If you serve it for anyone in a higher-risk group, keep it firm.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Parboiled or raw

Do you need the first cook?

1. Fry cubes of raw potato and parboiled potato in two pans, the same oil and heat.
2. Cook until each is done.

Look for: The raw potatoes take much longer and are often dark outside before they are done in the middle. The parboiled ones are crisp and tender.

EXPERIMENT

Oil, butter or both

Which fat?

1. Fry three batches of sauté potatoes: in oil, in butter, and in oil with butter added at the end.
2. Taste each.

Look for: Butter alone burns and goes dark. Oil browns well. Oil with butter at the end gives the best flavour.

EXPERIMENT

Pan size and heat

Crowded or spacious?

1. Fry the same potatoes in a small pan (crowded) and a large pan (single layer).
2. Compare the browning.

Look for: The crowded potatoes steam and stay pale. The single layer browns.

EXPERIMENT

Pressed or turned

Do you touch the rösti?

1. Cook two röstis. Press one down and leave it for 10 minutes. Stir and turn the other every minute.
2. Compare how they hold together.

Look for: The pressed one forms a cake with a crisp crust; the stirred one falls into crispy strands (hash-style).

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Sauté potatoes				
Hash browns				
Rösti				
Tortilla				
Parboiled vs raw				
Oil, butter or both				
Crowded vs spacious				
Pressed vs turned				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Pale and soggy	Wet, crowded, or heat too low	Dry thoroughly; one layer; medium-high heat
Burnt outside, raw inside	Too hot, or skipped the cook first	Parboil; lower the heat

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Sticking	Pan not hot, or moved too soon	Heat the pan and oil; wait until it releases
Rösti falls apart	Too wet, or turned too early	Squeeze dry; press; leave 10 minutes
Tortilla stuck to the pan	Poor non-stick, or not enough oil	Use a non-stick pan and add oil
Greasy	Oil not hot enough	Heat the pan first; drain on kitchen paper

FOOD SAFETY: FRYING, EGGS AND ACRYLAMIDE

Go for gold. When starchy foods such as potatoes are fried, roasted or baked at high temperatures they form a chemical called acrylamide, which the Food Standards Agency says could raise cancer risk. Its advice is to cook to a **golden yellow, not dark brown**, and to follow the packet instructions on bought chips and roasties. A balanced diet matters more than any single food, so this is a nudge about colour, not a reason to avoid potatoes.

Hot oil in a pan can spit. Dry the potatoes, use a pan with sides, and never leave it. The tortilla contains eggs, so use Lion-marked eggs and cook it until set. **Raw potatoes:** keep them somewhere cool, dark and dry (above about 6°C), not in the fridge and not in the light. The Food Standards Agency advises against keeping raw potatoes in the fridge if you will roast or fry them, because the cold raises the amount of acrylamide that forms when they brown. Light turns the skin green and makes sprouts, and the green and the sprouts contain a natural toxin (solanine) that is bitter and can upset your stomach. Cut away sprouts and any green patches generously; if a potato is green all over, or tastes bitter, throw it away. Cooking does not remove it.

Cooked potatoes: cool them quickly (spread out, within 1 to 2 hours), keep them covered in the fridge, and eat them within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once. (This is the general chilled-leftovers advice relayed by local-authority food-safety pages; unlike rice, potatoes have no special rule of their own, but they are starchy, so they are treated with the same care.)

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can parboil, dry and brown potatoes in a pan.
- ☐ I can squeeze grated potato dry.
- ☐ I can make rösti and flip it safely.
- ☐ I can make a tortilla set all the way through.
- ☐ I know to leave potatoes alone until golden.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1, chapter 7 is Gratins and Potato Bakes: slicing evenly and setting a bake.

Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1

Chapter 7 · Gratins and Potato Bakes

SKILL GOAL

Slice potatoes evenly and bake them in a liquid until tender with a golden top.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

A gratin is potatoes cooked in a liquid until they are tender, with a golden top. The skills are **even slicing**, **the right liquid**, and **the right temperature**: low and slow, so the middle cooks before the top burns.

VERSION	LIQUID	CHARACTER
Stock-baked layers	Stock	Light and savoury
Boulangère	Stock and onions	Sweet and mellow
Lighter milk gratin	Milk	Creamy but lighter
Dauphinoise	Cream and milk	Rich and luxurious

- **Slice evenly, about 3 mm.** A mandolin is best. **Use its guard or a cut-resistant glove:** mandolins cause many kitchen injuries.
- **Don't rinse the slices** in cream-based gratins. The starch thickens the sauce.
- **All-rounder or waxy** potatoes keep their shape; floury ones fall apart.
- **Rest for 10 minutes** so the bake sets.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Stock-baked potato layers

1 hour 30 minutes | 3 to 4 portions | no cream, just stock

The simplest bake: sliced potatoes baked in seasoned stock until tender, with the top browned. Light, and a good starting point.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

600 g	all-rounder or waxy potatoes (e.g. Desiree), peeled and sliced 3 mm thick
300 ml	hot vegetable or chicken stock
1 tsp	butter, for the dish
1	garlic clove, crushed
1 tsp	chopped thyme
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Heat the oven to **180°C fan (200°C conventional, gas 6)**. Butter a 1.5 litre baking dish and rub it with the garlic.
2. Slice the potatoes evenly (a mandolin is best, with its guard; otherwise a sharp knife). Layer them in the dish, seasoning each layer and scattering over the thyme.
3. Pour in the hot stock until it just reaches the top layer.
4. Cover with foil and bake for **40 minutes**. Remove the foil and bake for 25 to 30 minutes, until golden and a knife slides in easily.

LEVEL 2 · FRENCH

Boulangère potatoes

1 hour 45 minutes | 4 portions | potatoes and onions in stock

A French baker's dish: potatoes layered with softened onions and baked in stock. The onions give it a mellow sweetness.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

600 g	all-rounder potatoes, peeled and sliced 3 mm thick
2	onions, thinly sliced
1 tbsp	olive oil
1 tsp	butter, plus a knob for the top
350 ml	hot vegetable or chicken stock
1 tsp	thyme leaves
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Soften the onions in the oil and butter over a low heat for **10 to 12 minutes**, until soft but not browned.
2. Heat the oven to 180°C fan (200°C conventional, gas 6). Layer the potatoes and onions in a buttered dish with seasoning and thyme, finishing with a layer of overlapping potato slices.
3. Pour over the hot stock, dot the top with butter and cover with foil.
4. Bake for **45 minutes**, uncover, and bake for 25 to 30 minutes more until golden.

LEVEL 3 · THE TREAT

Dauphinoise

1 hour 45 minutes | 4 portions | rich: a treat

The famous gratin. Potatoes simmered briefly in cream and milk, then baked until the top is golden and the cream has thickened. Rich enough to be a meal in itself with a salad.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

600 g	all-rounder potatoes, peeled and sliced 3 mm thick
300 ml	double cream
150 ml	whole milk
2	garlic cloves, crushed
1 pinch	nutmeg
1 tsp	butter, for the dish
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Heat the oven to **160°C fan (180°C conventional, gas 4)**. Butter a 1.5 litre dish and rub it with a little of the garlic.
2. Put the cream, milk, remaining garlic, nutmeg and seasoning in a large pan. Add the potato slices (**don't rinse them**: the starch thickens the sauce) and bring to a gentle simmer for **5 minutes**, stirring carefully so they don't break.
3. Transfer the slices and cream to the dish, spreading in even layers. Press down lightly.
4. Bake for **1 hour to 1 hour 15 minutes**, until golden, bubbling and a knife slides in easily. Rest for 10 minutes before serving.

> **WHY SIMMER FIRST**
>
> Pre-cooking the slices in the cream heats them evenly, so they cook faster and the cream doesn't curdle in the oven.

LEVEL 2 · LIGHTER

Lighter milk gratin

1 hour 30 minutes | 4 portions | a lighter dauphinoise

The same method with milk instead of cream, and a little cheese on top for browning. It can curdle slightly, but still tastes good.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

600 g	all-rounder potatoes, peeled and sliced 3 mm thick
400 ml	semi-skimmed milk
1	bay leaf
1	garlic clove, crushed
30 g	Gruyère or mature Cheddar, grated
1 tsp	butter, for the dish
1 pinch	nutmeg, salt and pepper

1. Heat the oven to 160°C fan (180°C conventional, gas 4). Heat the milk with the bay leaf, garlic, nutmeg and seasoning until steaming, and let it infuse for 5 minutes.
2. Layer the potatoes in a buttered dish and pour over the milk (remove the bay leaf).
3. Cover with foil and bake for **45 minutes**. Uncover, sprinkle with the cheese and bake for 30 minutes more, until golden and tender.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Slice thickness

How thin?

1. Make three small gratins in ramekins with slices 2 mm, 4 mm and 8 mm thick, all with the same liquid.
2. Bake together and test with a knife every 10 minutes.

Look for: The thin slices turn soft and can become mush. The thick ones stay firm in the middle. About 3 mm is a good balance.

EXPERIMENT

Pre-cook or not

Is the simmer worth it?

1. Make two small dauphinoise. Simmer the slices in the cream first for one; layer the other raw with the cream poured over.
2. Bake both for the same time.

Look for: The simmered gratin is evenly cooked and thick. The raw one takes longer and may have firm potato underneath.

EXPERIMENT

Cream, milk or stock

How much richness?

1. Bake three small gratins with cream, milk and stock.
2. Taste them.

Look for: Cream is rich and smooth, milk is lighter but can split, stock is savoury and clean. All are good; they are different dishes.

EXPERIMENT

Rest or serve at once

Does resting help?

1. Cut a slice straight from the oven and another after 10 minutes.

Look for: The rested slice holds together and the sauce has thickened. The hot slice slumps.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Stock-baked layers				
Boulangère				
Dauphinoise				
Lighter milk gratin				
Slice thickness				
Pre-cook vs raw				
Cream, milk, stock				
Rested vs not				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Still hard in the middle	Slices too thick or oven too cool	Slice thinner; cover with foil; bake longer
Curdled or split sauce	Milk, high heat, or acid	Bake low and slow; use cream or add a little flour
Watery	Rinsed slices, or too much liquid	Don't rinse; liquid should just reach the top
Top burnt, middle raw	Oven too hot	Lower the heat and cover with foil
Grey slices	Peeled and left to stand	Slice just before assembling

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Greasy	Too much cheese or cream	Use less or switch to stock

FOOD SAFETY: SLICING AND STORAGE

Mandolin slicers are sharp and a leading cause of kitchen injuries: always use the guard or a cut-resistant glove, and stop when the potato gets small. **Raw potatoes:** keep them somewhere cool, dark and dry (above about 6°C), not in the fridge and not in the light. The Food Standards Agency advises against keeping raw potatoes in the fridge if you will roast or fry them, because the cold raises the amount of acrylamide that forms when they brown. Light turns the skin green and makes sprouts, and the green and the sprouts contain a natural toxin (solanine) that is bitter and can upset your stomach. Cut away sprouts and any green patches generously; if a potato is green all over, or tastes bitter, throw it away. Cooking does not remove it.

Gratins keep a lot of heat and cool slowly, so cut into portions and spread out to cool within 1 to 2 hours. **Cooked potatoes:** cool them quickly (spread out, within 1 to 2 hours), keep them covered in the fridge, and eat them within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once. (This is the general chilled-leftovers advice relayed by local-authority food-safety pages; unlike rice, potatoes have no special rule of their own, but they are starchy, so they are treated with the same care.)

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can slice potatoes evenly and safely.
- ☐ I can make a stock-baked gratin.
- ☐ I can make a dauphinoise.
- ☐ I know why I don't rinse the slices.
- ☐ I know the bake needs to rest.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1, chapter 8 is Soups, Salads and Cakes: potatoes as a base and a binder.

Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1

Chapter 8 · Soups, Salads and Cakes

SKILL GOAL

Use potatoes to thicken a soup, carry a dressing and bind a cake.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Potatoes also work as a **thickener** (soup), a **carrier of flavour** (salads) and a **binder** (cakes). The type matters: floury potatoes break down for soups and cakes, waxy ones keep their shape for salads.

DISH	POTATO	WHY
Soup	Floury or all-rounder	Breaks down to thicken and cream the soup
Warm salad	Waxy	Holds its shape when dressed
Mayonnaise salad	Waxy	Same, and needs cooling first
Fishcakes and potato cakes	Floury, mashed dry	Dry mash binds the mixture

- **For soup:** soften the leeks or onions slowly. Don't brown them, unless you want a darker flavour.
- **For salads:** dress while warm with a vinaigrette; add mayonnaise only when cool.
- **For cakes:** dry mash, chill the shaped cakes, and don't turn them too soon.

Try it

LEVEL 1 · START HERE

Leek and potato soup

40 minutes | 3 to 4 portions | cheap, filling, and nearly foolproof

The potato thickens the soup so it needs no cream. Soften the leeks gently without browning, for a pale, sweet soup.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

2 tsp	butter or olive oil
2	leeks (about 300 g), washed and sliced
300 g	floury or all-rounder potatoes, peeled and diced
700 ml	hot vegetable or chicken stock
100 ml	milk
1 pinch	salt and pepper
1 tbsp	chopped chives

1. Melt the butter in a large pan over a low heat. Add the leeks and a pinch of salt and cook gently for **8 to 10 minutes**, stirring, until soft but not coloured.
2. Add the potatoes and stock, bring to the boil, then simmer for **15 to 20 minutes** until the potatoes are completely soft.
3. Blend with a stick blender (or in batches in a jug blender) until smooth. Stir in the milk, season, and reheat gently.
4. Serve with the chives.

> **BLENDING HOT SOUP**
>
> Hot liquid can burst out of a blender. Fill a jug blender no more than half, hold the lid down with a cloth and vent the steam, or let the soup cool a little first.

LEVEL 1 · WARM

Warm potato salad

30 minutes | 2 portions | dressed while warm, with no mayo

The warm vinaigrette salad from chapter 1, with more in it. Good with grilled fish, sausages or eggs.

INGREDIENTS (2 PORTIONS)

400 g	waxy potatoes, scrubbed and cut into 2 cm pieces
1 tsp	salt, for the water
2 tbsp	extra-virgin olive oil
1 tbsp	white wine vinegar
1 tsp	Dijon mustard
3	spring onions, sliced
2 tbsp	chopped parsley or chives
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Boil the potatoes from cold in salted water for **10 to 12 minutes**, until just tender. Drain and steam dry.
2. Whisk the oil, vinegar, mustard and seasoning in a bowl. Add the warm potatoes with the spring onions and herbs and fold gently.
3. Serve warm or at room temperature.

LEVEL 2 · PICNIC

Classic potato salad

40 minutes plus cooling | 4 portions | creamy and chilled, so watch the storage

Cool the potatoes before adding the mayonnaise, or it turns oily. A splash of vinegar on the warm potatoes gives flavour right through.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

500 g	waxy potatoes, scrubbed
1 tsp	salt, for the water
1 tbsp	white wine vinegar
3 tbsp	mayonnaise
2 tbsp	plain yoghurt
2	spring onions, sliced
1 tbsp	chopped chives
1 tsp	wholegrain mustard
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Boil the potatoes whole, from cold, in salted water for **15 to 20 minutes** until tender. Drain, then cut into bite-size pieces.
2. Sprinkle the vinegar over the warm potatoes and let them cool completely (about 30 minutes).
3. Mix the mayonnaise, yoghurt, mustard, spring onions, chives and seasoning. Fold gently into the cool potatoes.
4. Chill for at least 30 minutes before serving.

> **KEEP IT COLD**
>
> Potato salad with mayonnaise should be kept chilled and eaten within 2 days. Don't leave it out in the sun at a picnic for more than 2 hours.

LEVEL 3 · BINDER

Salmon and potato fishcakes

1 hour plus chilling | 2 to 3 portions (6 cakes) | mash makes the binder

Dry, firm mash holds fishcakes together. Wet mash makes them fall apart. Use tinned salmon (cooked already), and chill the cakes before frying.

INGREDIENTS (3 PORTIONS)

300 g	floury potatoes, peeled and cut up
1 tsp	salt, for the water
1 tin	pink or red salmon (200 g), drained
2	spring onions, finely sliced
1 tbsp	chopped parsley
½	lemon, zest only
2 tbsp	plain flour, for dusting
1	Lion-marked egg, beaten, for coating
40 g	dried breadcrumbs
2 tbsp	sunflower oil, for frying
1 pinch	salt and pepper

1. Boil the potatoes in salted water for 15 to 20 minutes until soft. Drain, steam dry for 2 minutes and mash until smooth. Let it cool for 15 minutes.
2. Flake in the salmon (the soft tinned bones are edible and a source of calcium; remove them if you prefer), the spring onions, parsley, lemon zest and seasoning. Mix gently.
3. Shape into 6 patties, about 2 cm thick. Coat each in flour, then beaten egg, then breadcrumbs. **Chill for at least 30 minutes.**
4. Heat the oil in a frying pan over a medium heat. Fry for **4 to 5 minutes a side**, until golden and hot all the way through.
5. Drain on kitchen paper and serve with a squeeze of lemon.

PLAIN POTATO CAKES

> Leave out the salmon and use 1 tablespoon more flour. Add cheese, herbs or leftover cooked vegetables instead.

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

Blended or mashed soup

What texture do you like?

1. Divide the soup after cooking. Blend half until silky and mash the other half roughly with a masher.
2. Taste both.

Look for: The blended soup is smooth and creamy. The mashed one is chunky and more rustic. Neither needs cream.

EXPERIMENT

Warm or cold dressing

When to add mayo.

1. Fold mayonnaise into one batch of warm potatoes and another of cooled potatoes.
2. Compare after 30 minutes.

Look for: The warm one goes oily and loose as the mayonnaise melts. The cool one stays creamy.

EXPERIMENT

Waxy or floury in salad

Check the type.

1. Make the warm salad with waxy potatoes and again with floury ones.
2. Compare how they hold.

Look for: The floury potatoes break up into a mushy salad. The waxy ones keep their shape.

EXPERIMENT

Binder amount

How much holds a cake together?

1. Make potato cakes with mash only, and with 1 and 2 tablespoons of flour added per 300 g potatoes.
2. Fry and compare.

Look for: No flour: cakes may fall apart. A little flour holds them. Too much makes them stodgy.

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Leek and potato soup				
Warm potato salad				
Classic potato salad				
Fishcakes				
Blended vs mashed soup				
Warm vs cool mayo				
Waxy vs floury salad				
Binder amount				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Soup gluey	Over-blended floury potato	Blend briefly; use all-rounder potatoes
Soup bland	Unseasoned, or weak stock	Season well; use a better stock

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Salad mushy	Floury potatoes or overcooked	Use waxy and test early
Salad oily	Mayo added to warm potatoes	Cool completely first
Fishcakes fall apart	Wet mash, or not chilled	Dry the mash; chill 30 minutes
Fishcakes burnt outside, cold inside	Heat too high	Medium heat; finish in a 180°C oven if thick

FOOD SAFETY: SOUP, MAYONNAISE AND FISHCAKES

Blending hot soup can splash and scald: half-fill the jug and hold the lid down with a cloth. Potato salad with mayonnaise must be kept cold and eaten within 2 days. Fishcakes must be hot all the way through, so cut one open to check. The fish here is tinned and already cooked. Use Lion-marked eggs for the coating. **Cooked potatoes:** cool them quickly (spread out, within 1 to 2 hours), keep them covered in the fridge, and eat them within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once. (This is the general chilled-leftovers advice relayed by local-authority food-safety pages; unlike rice, potatoes have no special rule of their own, but they are starchy, so they are treated with the same care.)

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can make a creamy potato soup without cream.
- ☐ I can dress a potato salad warm and add mayonnaise cool.
- ☐ I can make mash dry enough to bind a cake.
- ☐ I know why waxy potatoes suit salads.
- ☐ I can fry fishcakes until they are hot all the way through.

NEXT CHAPTER

Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1, chapter 9 is Putting It Together: a roast dinner with every potato trimming, a make-ahead supper and your skills table.

Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1

Chapter 9 · Putting It Together

SKILL GOAL

Plan a potato meal and a week of potato dishes, and record your own skills and recipes.

Shopping list for this chapter

The basics

Potatoes are cheap, filling and versatile, which makes them ideal for planning. This chapter combines the skills of the course: choosing the right potato, cooking it well, and getting a meal to the table with everything hot at the same time. Then you write your own skills table and house recipes.

Match the potato to the job

I WANT...	USE	METHOD
Fluffy mash	Floury	Boil, steam-dry, ricer or masher, warm milk and butter
Crisp roasties	Floury	Par-boil, steam-dry, shake, hot fat
Chips and wedges	Floury or all-rounder	Cut evenly, soak and dry, hot oven or double-cook
A jacket	Large floury	Dry, prick, bake on the shelf
Salad and boiling	Waxy	Simmer from cold, dress warm
Gratins	All-rounder or waxy	Slice 3 mm, low and slow
Soup and cakes	Floury	Break down, or mash dry

Try it

LEVEL 3 · MAKE-AHEAD

Cheesy potato and leek bake (for four)

1 hour 45 minutes | 4 portions | assemble ahead, bake when you need it

A main-course version of the gratin: potato slices, softened leeks, mustard and cheese. Serve with a green salad. It can be assembled the day before and baked when needed.

INGREDIENTS (4 PORTIONS)

800 g	all-rounder potatoes, peeled and sliced 3 mm thick
2	leeks, washed and sliced
1 tbsp	olive oil
200 ml	single cream or crème fraîche
250 ml	hot vegetable stock
80 g	mature Cheddar, grated
1 tsp	Dijon mustard
1 pinch	nutmeg, salt and pepper
1 tsp	butter, for the dish

1. Soften the leeks in the oil over a low heat for 8 to 10 minutes. Stir the mustard into the cream and stock with the nutmeg and seasoning.
2. Heat the oven to **180°C fan (200°C conventional, gas 6)**. Butter a 2 litre dish. Layer the potatoes, leeks and half the cheese, seasoning each layer.
3. Pour over the creamy stock and scatter the rest of the cheese on top. Cover with foil.
4. Bake for **50 minutes**, uncover and bake for 25 to 30 minutes more, until golden and a knife slides in easily. Rest for 10 minutes.

> **MAKE AHEAD**
>
> Assemble (without baking), cover and chill for up to a day. Bake from cold for 15 minutes longer.

A roast dinner with all the potato trimmings

A Sunday dinner built around three potato dishes: roast potatoes (chapter 3), a gratin (chapter 7) and mash (chapter 2), with a roast of your choice. The art is the timetable, not the recipes.

TIME BEFORE SERVING	WHAT TO DO (A ROAST FOR 4 WITH THREE POTATO DISHES)
The day before	Make the dauphinoise or the potato bake and chill it (cover, in the fridge). Peel potatoes and keep them in cold water in the fridge.
2 hours 30	Put the meat or nut roast in the oven following its own timing. Bring the gratin out of the fridge.
1 hour 45	Par-boil the roasting potatoes (8 to 10 minutes), steam-dry and shake. Heat the tray of oil.
1 hour 30	Put the roasties into the oven. Put the gratin in on the lower shelf.
45 minutes	Turn the roasties. Prepare the vegetables.
20 minutes	Take the roast out to rest. Boil the potatoes for mash. Heat plates.
10 minutes	Mash with warm milk and butter. Check the roasties are golden, not dark.
Serving	Carve, and serve everything straight away. Everything cooked should be steaming hot.

Potatoes for a week

DAY	POTATO DISH	NOTES
Monday	Jacket potatoes with beans and cheese	Bake in the morning on a day off or in the evening with a microwave start
Tuesday	Leek and potato soup	Make a big batch; freeze half
Wednesday	Warm potato salad with eggs or fish	Leftover boiled potatoes work
Thursday	Oven chips or wedges with grilled fish or sausages	Quick, one tray
Friday	Fishcakes	Use up leftover mash (within 2 days)
Saturday	Tortilla	Eat warm or cold
Sunday	Roast potatoes	The big one

Experiments

EXPERIMENT

One potato, five ways

The grand finale.

1. Take five potatoes of the same variety. Boil one, mash one, roast one, bake one and fry one as chips.
2. Taste all five side by side and note which method suits that variety best.

Look for: A floury potato shines mashed, roasted and baked. It's average boiled and poor in a salad. A waxy one is the reverse. Now you know why.

EXPERIMENT

A timed roast

Can you get it all hot at once?

1. Cook the roast dinner timetable for two. Write down the real time each step finished against the plan.
2. Note what ran late.

Look for: The first time, the potatoes take longer than you plan and the mash is cold. The second time is better. Write adjustments in your house recipes.

EXPERIMENT

Your own favourite

Invent a dish.

1. Pick a potato method and invent a variation (new herbs, spices, a cheese or a topping) for one portion.
2. Cook it twice, adjusting once, and write down the recipe.

Look for: A good variation changes one thing at a time so you know what made the difference.

Your skills table

SKILL	CAN DO IT	STILL PRACTISING	NOTES
Choosing floury or waxy			
Boiling and steaming			
Mashing without glue			
Roast potatoes			
Chips and wedges			
Baked potatoes			
Pan-frying			
Gratins			
Soup, salad and cakes			
Planning a roast dinner			

Your house recipes

RECIPE	POTATO	METHOD	NOTES
Everyday potato side			
Weekend roast potatoes			
Comfort food			
Dinner party dish			

Tasting notes

WHAT I TRIED	METHOD OR AMOUNT	WHAT I SAW	WHAT I THOUGHT	WILL I DO IT AGAIN?
Cheesy potato and leek bake				
Roast dinner				
One potato, five ways				
Your own favourite				

Troubleshooting

PROBLEM	LIKELY CAUSE	WHAT TO DO
Everything cold at once	No timetable	Write one, working backwards from serving
Not enough oven space	Too many dishes	Choose one oven dish and one hob dish; use the grill
Roasties soft	Waiting around	Keep them in a hot oven until the last minute
Mash cold	Cooked too soon	Mash last, cover and keep hot
Too many potatoes	Overbuying	Plan portions: about 200 to 250 g per person
Leftovers go to waste	No plan	Fishcakes, soup and tortilla all use leftovers

FOOD SAFETY: THE WHOLE COURSE

Raw potatoes: keep them somewhere cool, dark and dry (above about 6°C), not in the fridge and not in the light. The Food Standards Agency advises against keeping raw potatoes in the fridge if you will roast or fry them, because the cold raises the amount of acrylamide that forms when they brown. Light turns the skin green and makes sprouts, and the green and the sprouts contain a natural toxin (solanine) that is bitter and can upset your stomach. Cut away sprouts and any green patches generously; if a potato is green all over, or tastes bitter, throw it away. Cooking does not remove it.

Go for gold. When starchy foods such as potatoes are fried, roasted or baked at high temperatures they form a chemical called acrylamide, which the Food Standards Agency says could raise cancer risk. Its advice is to cook to a **golden yellow, not dark brown**, and to follow the packet instructions on bought chips and roasties. A balanced diet matters more than any single food, so this is a nudge about colour, not a reason to avoid potatoes.

Foil and baked potatoes: a cooked potato wrapped in foil and left to cool or keep warm at room temperature can let the bacterium that causes botulism grow, because foil shuts out air. Cases are rare but serious. Take the foil off as soon as the potato is baked, don't leave baked potatoes out for more than about 4 hours, and chill leftovers (unwrapped) in the fridge.

Hot oil and hot fat need care: never leave them unattended, never use water on a fat fire. **Cooked potatoes:** cool them quickly (spread out, within 1 to 2 hours), keep them covered in the fridge, and eat them within **2 days**. Reheat until steaming hot all the way through, and only once. (This is the general chilled-leftovers advice relayed by local-authority food-safety pages; unlike rice, potatoes have no special rule of their own, but they are starchy, so they are treated with the same care.)

CHECKPOINT: CAN YOU DO THIS NOW?

- ☐ I can choose the right potato for the job.
- ☐ I can boil, mash, roast, bake, fry and gratin potatoes well.
- ☐ I can plan a meal so everything is hot together.
- ☐ I know the safety rules for storing, frying and baking potatoes.
- ☐ I have my own skills table and house recipes.

NEXT CHAPTER

That finishes **Cooking Skills: Potatoes 1**. The next course in the series plan is Knife Skills: grip, onions, herbs and vegetables.