

Friends International - Dundee

POTATOES

"Why do you *have* to eat potatoes with *every* meal?" asked Sylvie in frustration, after almost a year in a University residence. Sylvie and Andrea challenged us to cook a meal without using any potatoes.

In October our children have two weeks off school. The origin of this holiday was to allow the children of Angus to help with the potato harvest. Smaller "new" potatoes are harvested throughout the summer, then the main crop of mature potatoes is harvested in the autumn. Potatoes are always cheap in the shops, so here are some ideas for cooking potatoes.

Different kinds of potatoes are suitable for different dishes and if you buy from a supermarket, the potatoes may be labelled to show how they are best prepared.

New Potatoes: these small early potatoes should not be peeled. Just scrub off any mud. Place them in boiling water in a pan on top of the cooker. The boiling water should be deep enough to cover the potatoes. Add salt and boil for about 20 minutes (vary the time a little according to the size of the potatoes) until they are soft enough to eat. If the potatoes are mushy or break up in the water, you have cooked them too long. If they are hard and have little flavour, you have not cooked them long enough. If you can push in a knife without too much pressure while they are boiling in the pan, then they are just right. Serve them hot with pepper and salt and sprinkle on some chopped herbs such as parsley, thyme, chives or basil.

Salad Potatoes: cook new potatoes as above, then cool them. Serve them cold with chopped up lettuce, herbs and some vegetables such as peas, beans, finely chopped carrots, apples or celery. Mix everything together in some mayonnaise.

Baked Potatoes: You need large mature potatoes. When you are buying, ask for potatoes that are suitable for baking, since some varieties do not cook easily in the oven and would take a long time to go soft. Heat your oven to 190 degrees Centigrade or 375 degrees Fahrenheit or gas mark 5. Scrub the mud off the potatoes and place them on a metal baking sheet. When the oven is hot, put the potatoes in the oven for about one hour. Eat them when the skin is crisp and the potato inside is soft and crumbly. If you wish, cut them in half and allow a little butter to melt into the surface of the potato or cut them in half and heap other food on top of the open potatoes.

I sometimes cook baked potatoes a different way. Instead of putting the potatoes on an open baking sheet, I wrap the washed potatoes in some aluminium foil

together with thyme, rosemary, parsley and salt. While the potatoes are baking in the oven, the flavours of the herbs will be absorbed by the potatoes.

Potatoes and Cheese: Use a hard cheese with a strong flavour. Most people here use Cheddar cheese a lot for cooking but you could be more adventurous. Take large potatoes and scrub them, leaving on the skin. Place them in boiling water, add salt and boil them for about 25 minutes (20 minutes is enough for smaller potatoes). When they are soft, cut them in half and place a slice of the cheese on the open surface. Place them with the cheese upwards under a hot grill for 1 to 2 minutes or until the cheese is hot and bubbling.

Mashed Potatoes: Wash the potatoes and remove the skin from the surface with a scraper or knife. If the potatoes are large, cut them into smaller pieces. All of the pieces should be about the same size. Place them in boiling water in a pan on top of the cooker. The boiling water should be deep enough to cover the potatoes. Add salt and boil for about 20 minutes, until they are soft enough to cut easily with a knife (but not until they start to break up in the water). (You may have to vary the time a little according to the size of the potatoes.) When they are ready, (see above under "New Potatoes") drain away all the hot water. Mash the potatoes by squashing them with a potato masher or anything you have that is hard and heavy. You should produce a soft smooth paste. Stir in butter and a little milk together with pepper and salt.

Mashed potato can be used as it is. Often it is used as a topping for pies.

1) **Fish pie:**

Cover the inside of a casserole or pie dish with a thin layer of butter, margerine or oil to stop the food sticking to it. Heat your oven to 180 degrees Centigrade, 350 degrees Fahrenheit or gas mark 4. Take some cod or haddock and remove any bones and skin then cut the fish into smaller pieces. Chop up some onion and fry it a little in some butter or margerine, add garlic, a little lemon juice and the pieces of fish. Do not overcook the fish. Add some pepper and herbs if you wish. Place this mixture in the bottom of the dish. Place some finely grated cheese on top and spread it over the surface. Put the mashed potato on top of the cheese and spread it over the whole surface so that the fish is sealed. Put the pie into the hot oven for 20 minutes. The potato will go slightly brown and crisp on top.

2) **Shepherd's pie:**

Heat your oven to 180 degrees Centigrade, 350 degrees Fahrenheit or gas mark 4. Take some minced lamb and finely chopped onions and cook them in a pan with a little oil until the meat goes brown. Add chopped carrots and continue to cook. Add any one or more of the following chopped vegetables: celery, mushrooms, tomatoes, turnip, parsnip, parsley or garlic. Cook a little longer. At

this point you need to add a *little* liquid. Rather than adding just plain water, why not add water that has been previously used in cooking and has some flavour, perhaps water that has been used to cook vegetables or meat for the previous meal? When you have added the liquid to the mixture, boil it all a little longer to evaporate some of the liquid until you produce a thick sauce with the meat. Cover the inside of a casserole or pie dish with a thin layer of butter, margarine or oil to stop the food sticking to it. Place the mixture in the bottom of the dish. Put the mashed potato on top of the meat and spread it over the whole surface so that the meat is sealed in. Put the pie into the hot oven for 20 minutes. The potato will go slightly brown and crisp on top.

If you would like details of events being organised by Friends International-Dundee or of interest to International students, if you would like to read about interesting places to visit in Dundee and the surrounding area or if you want to try out some more of our own Scottish recipes please visit our web site at www.friendsinternational-dundee.org.uk. The site also contains details of coming events of interest to International students, useful contacts and website addresses.