

Potatoes

Popularity

Americans eat about a potato a day, according to USDA figures. One in every three restaurant meals includes potatoes. At present, potatoes are one of the world's most important foods. Americans eat more potatoes than any other vegetable, and account for more than 25 percent of all the vegetables eaten by children.

America's Top 10 Veggies, in order of Popularity

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| 1. Potatoes | 6. Celery |
| 2. Iceberg Lettuce | 7. Corn |
| 3. Tomatoes | 8. Broccoli |
| 4. Onions | 9. Green Cabbage |
| 5. Carrots | 10. Cucumbers |

"New Potato" versus "Main Crop Potatoes"

Early potatoes are thin-skinned new potatoes that are harvested and eaten young; traditionally they are a spring and early summer vegetable. Main crop potatoes are thick-skinned, larger, and keep well; these comprise the late summer and autumn vegetable that is traditionally stored over winter.

Nutrition

Potatoes, a complex carbohydrate food, are 2 percent protein. Just beneath the potato skin are significant quantities of manganese, chromium, selenium, and molybdenum. They are a good source of vitamin C, B vitamins (especially B1) and potassium. From 10 to 50 percent of a potato's potassium may be lost during boiling; steaming, baking, and frying do not significantly reduce the potassium.

Cautions

Potatoes are among the foods we eat highest in chemical residues. Recent USDA data found 38 different contaminants on potatoes, including hormone-disrupting pesticides such as endosulfans and the insecticide thiabendazole, which can cause brain and nervous system damage.

Not all chemicals used on our crops are insecticides. Sprout inhibitors are used on root crops like potatoes and onions. The inhibitors are sprayed on potatoes after harvest to prevent the eyes from sprouting. One of the most commonly used inhibitors, maleic hydrazide, was injected into baby mice who developed liver tumors within the year. Over a twenty year period most people ingest more maleic hydrazide from potatoes alone to more than equal the amount given those mice.

Do not eat the potato sprouts ("eyes") or any green-colored flesh or greenish skin; they contain the poisonous alkaloid "solanine."

Tomatoes, potatoes, peppers (red and green bell peppers, chili peppers, paprika), and eggplant belong to the nightshade family, a botanical group that also includes tobacco and some other very toxic plants like belladonna (deadly nightshade), henbane, mandrake, and jimsonweed. Some of these dangerous species have a long history of use in shamanism and witchcraft in Europe and the Americas. There has been much suspicion about the edible members of the family, especially when they have been introduced to cultures unfamiliar with them. For example, Europeans thought potatoes were poisonous when they first arrived from Peru, and in fact all parts of the plant, except the tuber, are poisonous.

Actually a small percentage of arthritis sufferers are nightshade-sensitive and will experience benefit if they eliminate all foods containing these vegetables.

Potatoes should be stored in a dark, cool, dry place. If they are stored exposed to light, green patches will develop which can be poisonous, and they will go moldy if kept damp. When buying potatoes in bulk, it is best to buy them in paper sacks rather than plastic bags as humid conditions will cause them to go rotten. Similarly, if you buy potatoes in polythene bags, remove them when you get home and place them in a vegetable rack or in a paper bag, in a dark place.

The Irish Potato Famine

In the late 1700's and early 1800's, the population increase in Ireland occurred mainly in the rural areas and rose fastest among the poorest sections of society. This was made possible by a diet of ample potatoes and milk, which even the poorest could afford. The mild climate and abundant summer rain produced large crops. Towards the mid-1800's, a blight started to appear on the potatoes.

The famine that followed the outbreaks of blight in 1845 and 1846 was the worst that Ireland had ever experienced. By June 1847 over 3,000,000 people were receiving emergency rations from government-sponsored soup kitchens. Even so, it is estimated that between 1846 and 1851 over 1,500,000 died, and nearly 1,000,000 emigrated, the majority to England, but many of those who could still afford the fare, to America.

"My idea of heaven is a great big baked potato and someone to share it with." --**Oprah Winfrey**

From Your Organic Kitchen

Mashed Potato-Stuff Peppers

4 medium poblano or Anaheim chili peppers
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 T red wine vinegar
1 T olive oil
salt & pepper to taste
1 lb all-purpose potatoes, peeled and cut into large chunks
2 T chives
4 oz cream cheese
1/4-1/2 C milk
1/2 C cheddar or Monterey Jack cheese, shredded

Cut the chili peppers in half lengthwise, removing the seeds and stems and scraping away most of the white membranes. In a medium bowl, combine the garlic, vinegar, oil, salt and pepper. Toss the chili peppers in the bowl to thoroughly coat. Place, cut side down, on a baking sheet and bake for 20 to 30 min, or until tender. 375 F.

Meanwhile, bring a large pot of salted water to a boil and cook the potatoes for 15 minutes, or until tender. Drain and place in a large bowl. Mash the potatoes with the chives. Cut the cream cheese into pieces and add to the potatoes, allowing it to melt. Mash. Add enough milk as you are mashing to make the potatoes smooth and creamy. Turn the peppers cut side up on the baking sheet. Mound the mashed potatoes in the baked peppers. Top with the shredded cheese. Bake for 15 min, or until lightly browned.

Autumn Vegetable Gratin

1/4 cup flour
1/4 cup brown sugar
1 C shredded cheddar cheese
salt & pepper
1 1/2 lb winter squash, peeled and thinly sliced
1 onion, peeled and thinly sliced

2 golden fleshed potatoes, peeled and thinly sliced
1 fennel bulb, peeled and thinly sliced
2 to 3 C milk
1/2 cup grated parmesan cheese

Oil a 2-quart baking dish. In a small bowl, combine the flour, brown sugar, cheddar, salt and pepper. Set aside. Layer one-third of the squash, onion, potatoes and fennel in the prepared baking dish. Dust with one-third of the flour mixture. Continue layering all three layers, finishing with the flour mixture. Pour the milk over all. Sprinkle with the parmesan.

Bake for 1 1/2 hours, 350 F, or until the vegetables are very tender and the gratin is golden brown. If the top browns too quickly, cover loosely with foil. Let stand for 15 min before serving.

Chard and Feta Pie

2 cups shredded potatoes (about two large)
2 green onions, minced
salt and pepper
6 eggs
1/4 C flour
2 T olive oil
1 red onion, finely chopped
2 garlic cloves, minced
2 bunches green or red chard or spinach, coarsely chopped
1 1/2 cups (8 oz) crumbled feta cheese
1 C milk
2 T oregano
1/2 C bread crumbs

Lightly oil a 9 inch deep dish pie plate. Place the potatoes and green onions in a colander and sprinkle with salt. Drain for 5 min, gently squeezing out any excess liquid. Place in a medium bowl and add one of the eggs, the flour, and pepper. Stir until well-blended. Press into the prepared pie plate to form a crust. Brush with 1 T of oil. Bake for 30 min, or until the crust is browned. Meanwhile, heat the remaining 1 T oil in a medium skillet over med-high heat. Add the red onion and cook for 4 min, or until soft. Add the garlic and chard or spinach and cook, stirring often, for 3 min, or until greens are wilted. Remove from heat, drain off excess liquid, and cool slightly.

In a large bowl, combine the remaining five eggs, 1 cup of the cheese, the milk, oregano, salt, and the greens mixture. Pour into baked crust. Sprinkle top with bread crumbs and remaining 1/2 cup cheese. Reduce oven heat to 350 F. Bake for 35 min, or until a knife inserted in the center comes out clean. Let stand 15 min before cutting.

Chicken Stew with Radish Dumplings

Stew

1 tablespoon olive oil
1 fennel bulb, sliced
4 boneless skinless chicken breasts, sliced into bite sized pieces
1/2 pound potatoes, peeled and cubed
2 carrots, sliced
2 tablespoons chopped fresh oregano
1/2 cup Madeira wine
6 cups chicken broth

Dumplings

1 cup unbleached all-purpose flour

½ teaspoon salt

3 tablespoons vegetable oil

3 tablespoons milk

1 egg, beaten

½ cup minced radishes

2 ½ tablespoons cornstarch

½ cup water

To make the stew: Heat the oil in a large pot over medium heat. Add the funnel, onion, and chicken and cook for 8 minutes or until lightly browned. Add the potatoes, carrots, oregano, wine, and broth to the pot. Bring to boil over high heat. Reduce the heat to low and simmer for 30 minutes, or until tender.

To make the dumplings: Meanwhile, in a medium bowl, combine the flour and salt. In a small bowl, combine the oil, milk, egg, and radishes. Gradually add to the flour mixture to form a soft dough.

In a small bowl, dissolve the cornstarch in the water. Add to the simmering stew and cook for 2 min or until thickened. Using 2 teaspoons, drop the dumpling batter into the simmer stew. Cover and cook for 10 min, or until dumplings are cooked through.

Sources:

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