



The Chef's Guide to Potatoes

Potatoes – a great New Zealand staple that chefs cannot afford to ignore. They taste great and people of all ages love them. Not only that, they are fantastically versatile and will add value to your menu.

The first and most important lesson to learn about potatoes is that they are not all the same. We often hear the comment that 'a spud is just a spud', but that isn't so. If you want the perfect potato dish then you must use the perfect potato for the job. But it isn't all about variety. There are many other factors that can influence the resulting dish: in particular how the potatoes have been stored, handled, and of course, cooked.

We also often hear 'If I select a potato variety I really like, why does it cook, and sometimes taste, differently from time to time?' This is simply the nature of the potato and it is why, as an industry, we are reticent to make a claim about a particular potato variety and its performance.

Potatoes give you more...

- **Taste:** delicious and versatile
- **Health:** low fat, high fibre and loads of Vitamin C
- **Convenience:** quick and easy to prepare
- **Variety:** lots of flavours
- **Locality:** grown all over New Zealand
- **Profit:** great value for money





How to get the best...

'Don't drop potatoes or put anything heavy on top of them – they are as fragile as eggs'
Tony Taylor, Fresh Connection

...boiled potatoes

A waxy textured potato will hold its shape well and have a wonderful smooth texture.

For boiled potatoes choose even sizes or cut them to even size, cover with cold water, add a pinch of salt and bring to the boil very gently. When the water is boiling turn the heat down so the potatoes just boil with a gentle ripple - this way they will stay whole and won't be too watery to eat. Vigorous boiling will cause most potatoes to break up. When just cooked, drain and return to the pan to rest for a brief period before serving. New potatoes should be started and cooked in boiling water. Add salt to the water if you wish.

To keep warm: You can keep boiled potatoes in a warm oven covered with buttered paper for a short while.

For best flavour with potato salads add your dressing ahead of time to allow flavours to be absorbed.

...baked potatoes

Pierce the skin in one or two places. Place in a really hot oven, 200°C, and cook for about an hour (dependent on size). This way, the skin becomes crunchy and the flesh very fluffy. You can bake almost any variety but remember the more floury potatoes will have fluffier textures and will absorb more fillings and flavours.

To keep warm: Jacket potatoes keep warm well, but you will lose the crispy skin. You can also cook them in advance and reheat when required in a hot oven.

...mashed potatoes

Select a floury textured potato – if you use a waxy textured potato the mash will be 'gluey'. Boil the potatoes, drain and then dry them out a little on the stove before mashing or ricing. When adding milk or cream to mash, heat the liquid to approximately the same temperature as the potatoes as this will ensure a very smooth even texture.

To keep warm: Cover with buttered paper and place in a warm oven. To serve, beat with a wooden spoon, adding a little more liquid if necessary.

'I always develop a good relationship with my supplier, he knows what I like. This way I know the potatoes will be great when they arrive in my restaurant'

Jonny Schwass –
Restaurant Schwass,
Christchurch

'Vary what you add to your mash. Traditional favourites of milk, butter, salt and pepper are delicious. Also try combinations of finely chopped herbs, grated cheese, plain yoghurt, sour cream, olives, capers, sun-dried tomatoes or sautéed onion, capsicum or mushroom.'





How to get the best...

'The difference between a good dish and a great dish is a pinch of salt- always taste and check the seasoning'
Paul Jobin – food by Paul Jobin

...chips

Floury textured potatoes make excellent chips – they will be crunchy on the outside and soft and fluffy in the centre. Cut chunky chips or wedges and cook in clean cooking medium at 175-180°C for 3 to 4 minutes (see tips, page 6). Drain thoroughly – shake, bang and hang the chip basket. Not only will the chips taste better, they will have around 20% less fat in them.

To keep warm: It is best to serve chips as soon as they are cooked but if you have to keep them warm place on a clean tray in a 140°C oven - but not for too long.

'The freshest potatoes taste the best'

Andy Gibb, V Base,
Christchurch Convention Centre

...roast potatoes

Selecting a floury textured potato gives you the best textured result.

Peel and cut into even sized pieces. Parboil in water for about ten minutes or until the outer layer of the potato is cooked. Preheat the oven to 200°C. Put a little oil in a pan and toss the potatoes to coat them in the oil. Alternatively use an oil spray to ensure even coating. In place of oil you could use clarified butter or dripping. Turn a couple of times during cooking. When golden brown, season and serve immediately. There are many different opinions on what makes the best roast. You don't have to parboil the potatoes first, but you do get great results. If you opt not to parboil first you will need to extend the cooking time.

To keep warm: Roast potatoes are best served immediately. They will keep warm in a 100°C oven but become hard very quickly. To prepare

them in advance, cook as per the previous instructions but remove from the oven just before they are fully cooked. Place on absorbent paper as before and reheat for 10 minutes.

Keep the amount of fat or oil added to a minimum. Use an oil spray for an even but light coating.

- Cut them differently – unpeeled or peeled, the choice is yours.
- Country style chips – cut the potatoes into thick slices.
- Criss-cross potatoes – halve a potato and cut criss-cross patterns in the cut half with a sharp knife and brush with oil. Bake cut side up.
- Hasselback – place one potato at a time in the hollow of a large spoon and make vertical slices. The spoon will stop you cutting right through. Brush with oil.
- Wedges – cut each potato into about 8 wedges.

'I always buy floury textured potatoes to make the fluffiest mash'

Michael Van de Elzen,
Outstanding Chef of the Year 2008,
Molten Restaurant, Mt Eden





What's in season?

"Your potato dish will only be as good as the quality of the potato you use"

Peter Gordon,
Dine by Peter Gordon

There is a lot of interest in different potato varieties. There are many grown in New Zealand, but there are no more than 10 to 12 varieties which are 'common' and readily available. In addition there are a lot of varieties which have limited and/or localised supplies.

Floury vs waxy

Basically, there are two main parts of a potato – water and starch. The more starch in the potato the more 'floury' it is and the more water; the more waxy in texture. It is important to remember both are different when cooked.

To determine which category a potato falls into, the percentage of dry matter is measured – in other words, the percentage within the potato which is not water.

Some potatoes have moderate amounts of starch. These potatoes fall into the 'general purpose' category and will tend to perform most tasks, although perhaps with not as good results as the ones which clearly fall into the floury or waxy category.

Here's what you need to know...



For **boiling, salads and casseroles** use waxy potatoes.

Waxy potatoes have a high water content and are low in starch. They have a dense texture and retain their shape during cooking. They don't absorb a lot of oils or dressing.

*Varieties which tend to be waxy are most early (new) season potatoes, Nadine, Draga, Frisia, Jersey, Bennie, Liseta, Red King Edward, Tiffany, Annabelle.**



Some potatoes can be used for most end uses.

These good all-rounders have a moderate starch content and are not too floury, not too waxy.

*Varieties which tend to be general-purpose are Rua, Desiree, Karaka, Moonlight, Red Ruby, Rocket, Maris Anchor, Van Rosa.**



For **mashing, wedges, roasting, chips and baking** use floury potatoes.

Floury potatoes are low in water content and high in starch. They have a dry and delicate texture, break up easily when cooked and absorb a lot of liquid and flavour.

*Varieties which tend to be floury are Ilam Hardy, Red Rascal, Agria (and related varieties Bolesta and Markies), Fianna, Victoria, Laura, Marabel.**

* Depends on growing conditions, weather, and time of year.



Consider this...

As the season progresses a potato changes e.g. an Ilam Hardy early in the season (October) is quite waxy. As the Ilam Hardy gets older it is a good all-purpose potato, whilst towards the end of the season when a lot more of the natural sugars have converted to starch, it tends to be floury! Not all potatoes show such a range of characteristics.

Weather, climate and soil have a dramatic effect on the cooking performance of a potato e.g. a Southland grown Nadine may be very waxy whilst a Pukekohe grown Nadine may be only slightly waxy. Flavour is also influenced.

Tips for great potato results:

The best advice is to select the right potato for the job. If a potato does not perform how you predicted you need to be prepared to change your cooking method to match the type of potato you have. No matter how clever you are as a chef or cook, if you have a floury potato it will not hold together when boiled and will not give you a good salad. Similarly, if you try and mash a waxy potato your mash will be gluey. Obviously personal preferences come into play, for example if you prefer your mash to be less fluffy – just select a potato that is less floury.



Perfect potatoes

Potatoes like perfect conditions

- Store potatoes in a well ventilated, cool, dark place.
- Don't put them in the fridge as the flavour changes will be noticeable.
- Always remove them from any plastic packaging.
- Handle carefully - even though they look tough potatoes do bruise easily.
- A heavy paper bag or cardboard box makes a good storage container.

What causes greening?

- When potatoes are exposed to light they can develop a green colour resulting in chlorophyll formation in the surface layers. Associated with this is the formation of a toxic alkaloid, solanine.
- The amount of green pigment depends on the intensity of the light, length of exposure and age of potato.
- New potatoes are susceptible to greening.
- Some varieties have quite a yellow flesh - don't confuse this with greening.
- If you do purchase potatoes with lots of greening return them to your retailer. If there are small amounts of greening simply peel or scrape away the greening and use the potato normally.

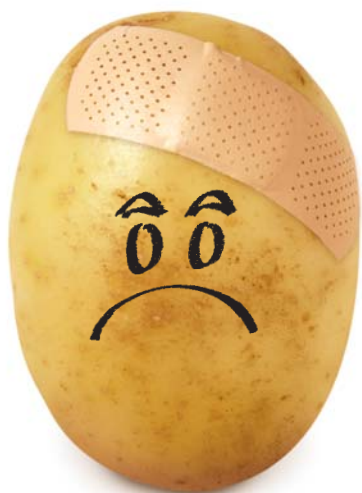
"We label our potatoes according to texture and how they cook - make sure you use the right potato for the right job!"

John Wilcox, Grower

What should you look for?

- Choose potatoes that haven't got any cuts, bruises
- Green patches or shoots.
- Sometimes you may choose a smooth looking potato over a misshapen one and assume that it is a better product. This is not necessarily the case as some varieties characteristically have skins which are netted or have eyes in them.
- A potato does not have to look good to cook brilliantly!

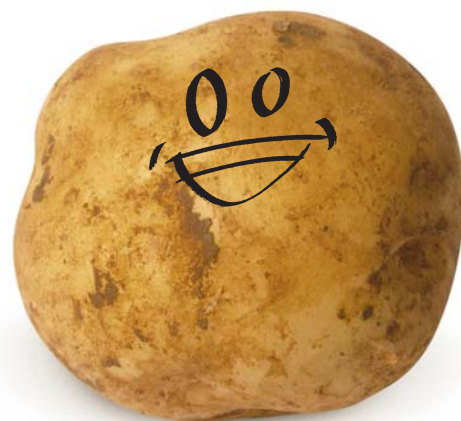
Handle me gently.



I like it in a cool dark place.



I may be an odd-ball, but I cook brilliantly.



Tips for better chips

USE THE GOOD OIL

Use a frying oil that meets the Industry Standards:

- Saturated fat – maximum 28%
- Trans fat – maximum 1%
- Linolenic acid – maximum 3%

Suppliers will tell you which oils meet the Industry Standards. These may include: high-oleic sunflower oil, high-oleic low-linolenic canola, rice bran oil, cottonseed oil and some blends of various oils.

Visit www.thechipgroup.co.nz for brands that meet the Industry Standards.

THICK CHIPS ARE BEST CHIPS

Use thick straight-cut chips, at least 13 mm wide.

NOT TOO MUCH SALT

Use salt sparingly if seasoning OR provide salt sachets.

HOW MUCH IS A PORTION?

A standard scoop of uncooked chips is approximately 330g. (approx 3 serves per kg)

In some food service and hospitality situations such as where food is shared, a standard scoop may not be appropriate.

IMPROVE YOUR SKILLS ONLINE... IT'S FUN & EASY!

Adopt best practice frying training for your staff.

Go to
The Chip Group online training
www.thechipgroup.co.nz

KEEP OIL IN GOOD CONDITION

Maintain your oil in good quality.

Keep fryer topped up with oil. Filter oil each day.

Cool oil and cover fryers when not in use.

Test and discard oil when it shows signs of degradation.

DRAIN OFF THE EXCESS OIL

After frying, bang or shake the basket vigorously two times. Hang the basket for at least 20 seconds.

KEEP YOUR OIL AT THE RIGHT TEMPERATURE

Cook your chips at a temperature of 175°C-180°C for between 3-4 minutes.

Use a digital thermometer to check the accuracy of the oil temperature every week.

