

Choosing the Right Potato for Your Next Recipe

By John Rizzo

Russets, Reds, Fingerlings — the list goes on. Do you know the difference between them and how it can affect your recipe? Besides appearance, the biggest difference is the starch and water content. And that's what needs to be considered when purchasing your potato.

Due to its reputation and popularity, and maybe out of habit, we often look for Idaho's when purchasing potatoes. The truth is Idaho's are not a species of potato, but a growing region for russets. With that said; let's look at russets, the most popular potato in the United States. High in starch and low in moisture, these potatoes are great for baking, mashing, and especially frying.

Although California long whites have less starch and a higher moisture content than russets; they can still be baked, fried and even boiled. These potatoes grow to about 6 inches long with a diameter of about 2 inches. Usually available from spring through summer, these potatoes have a firm creamy texture when cooked.

If you like to be on the cutting edge, you may enjoy fingerling potatoes. These have gained popularity over the past several years and are often served in upscale restaurants. They are only about an inch in diameter and grow to about 3 inches in length. Hmmm; kind of finger shaped or maybe more like a thumb. Low in starch and high in sugar content; these potatoes, usually cooked with the skin on, hold up nicely after baking, boiling, roasting, or frying.

Another potato that has found recent popularity is the yellow potato, such as the Yukon Gold. Low to medium in starch content and high in moisture, make these ideal for boiling and grilling. French fry companies have found a way to coat the surface with starch so that they stay crisp on the outside but are soft and creamy on the inside.

Another nice versatile potato is the Round White. These are available year round and can be prepared in a variety of ways. Being low to medium in starch and moist on the inside, make these eastern potatoes ideal for boiling, roasting and mashing.

Not to be outdone by the Round White, is the Round Red. Often referred to as new or bliss potatoes; they are often served with its thin red skin. Also very popular in restaurants, they are low to medium in starch and high in moisture. These are ideal for boiling, steaming, and salads. And as of late, it's not unusual to find these whipped with the skin on. Imagine, not peeling the potato before mashing it; and now you're a genius if you originated this trend. I would have been fired if I had tried this twenty years ago.

And lastly, if you are looking for something very unique, try to find the blue and purple heirloom potatoes. Only available in the fall, the flesh can be anywhere from sea blue to almost pale white while the skins are usually a blue gray color. Like the russets, these are high in starch and are great for mashing, baking and frying.

Sausage and Potato Soup

ield: 4.5 Quarts (12 servings)

Hot Italian Sausage, Bulk	12 oz.	Whole Milk, Scalded	2.5 Cups
Bacon Fat	1 TBL	Hot Sauce	Dash
Onion, Rough Cut	1.5 Cups	Worcestershire Sauce	2 tsp.
Celery, Rough Cut	2 Cups	Liquid Smoke	1/2 tsp.
Chicken Stock	6 Cups	Broccoli, Cut 1 inch	3 Cups
Peeled Potatoes, Rough Cut	8 Cups	Carrots, Grated	1 Cup
Green/Red Peppers, Cut 1/2 inch	1 Cup	Salt to Taste	

This recipe is written with pureeing in mind. Don't waste a lot of time with your cuts. If you purchased your sausage bulk (without the casing) cook it up in a skillet, breaking it into small pieces as it cooks; let drain. If your sausage is in the casing; remove it before cooking.

In a heavy saucepan, cook the onions and celery in the bacon fat until soft and translucent. Add the chicken stock and potatoes; bring to a boil, then reduce heat to a simmer. When the potatoes soften (about a half hour), puree the mixture in a food processor, blender or with an immersion blender. Return the mixture to low heat. Add the red and/or green peppers, sausage, hot sauce, Worcestershire, liquid smoke, and scalded milk (just below the boiling point). Cook on a very low heat and avoid curdling the mixture by not letting it boil or even simmer. When the peppers begin to soften add the broccoli; when it begins to soften add the grated carrots, season with salt and remove from heat.