



Potato Salad Grows Up

Match Yellow Finns, Red Bliss, and fingerlings with market-fresh ingredients for potato salads of substance

BY DORETTE E. SNOVER

My grandmother raised me in rural Pennsylvania, and some of my fondest memories are of shopping with her at a farmers' market, where we'd buy the freshly dug new potatoes that appeared on the stands every summer. I now live down South with a family of my own, and I go to a different farmers' market, but I still crave those potatoes.

In the summer months, there are always plenty of potato salads at my house. Over the years, I've



Low-starch fingerlings stay intact when tossed with a warm bacon dressing. Cayenne-toasted pecans add unexpected crunch.

Unusual combinations of ingredients give sophistication to potato salads. Here, pecans and bacon flavor a salad made with fingerling potatoes.



Dry boiled whole potatoes quickly by draining them and then putting them back in the pot over low heat for a few minutes.

developed recipes for many different types. I add interesting vegetables, unusual dressings and seasonings, seafood, meat, and sometimes even cheese to my salads. Far more than boiled potatoes mixed with a little mayo and chopped egg, they're potato salads that have grown up.

The potato's blandness is actually a virtue—in these salads, it brings out the best in a wide range of unexpected ingredients, taking potato salads from side dish to main course.

PICKING THE RIGHT POTATO

The surest way to keep cooked potatoes intact in salads is to choose the variety carefully. The best potatoes for salads are those with a low starch content, sometimes called waxy or, mistakenly, “new” potatoes. (New potatoes are simply those that are harvested young.) Common low-starch varieties include Red Bliss and Yellow Finn. Others that you might find at a farmers' market include blue Caribe, which turns a striking blue-violet when cooked, and tender, tasty fingerlings. Baking potatoes, typically Idahoes and russets, have a dry, mealy texture that's great for baking, mashing or making into fries—but they tend to absorb water and fall apart when boiled. Yukon Golds, too, tend to go mushy in potato salads.

For a more flavorful salad, boil the potatoes in salted water; don't wait to season them until the salad is made. Potatoes must be salted while they cook, or they'll taste flat regardless of how much salt you add later on.

There's more than one way to cook potatoes for a salad. Most often, I simply boil them, but roasted potatoes make fine salads, too. There's no reason to peel salad potatoes before you cook them, and most low-starch potatoes have a thin, tasty skin that needs

no peeling at all. For quick cooking, cut the potatoes into halves or quarters, or simply leave them whole and slice them after they've cooked and cooled. Boiled potatoes will dry quickly if you drain them, put them back in their cooking pot, and set the pot over low heat for just a few minutes. The cooked potatoes will hold up better in the salad if you chill them before cutting them into bite-sized pieces and combining them with other ingredients.

To keep potatoes intact, be gentle—especially when you're making a warm potato salad. I usually mix the dressing in the bottom of a large salad bowl and then gently add the potatoes. I prefer to use my hands to do the mixing, but if you'd rather not, stirring with a large spoon will do just fine, as long as you do it gently.

FOR SUMMERTIME EASE, COOK THE POTATOES IN ADVANCE

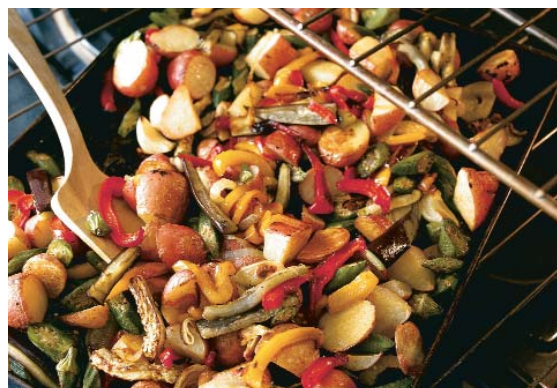
When making potato salad in the summer, I want it to be easy. Often I'll cook the potatoes early in the day and refrigerate them, so my family and I can set our sights towards a hike in the woods or a swim in the quarry. By the time I'm ready to make lunch or dinner, the potatoes are ready to be made into a salad that can be part of a picnic lunch or the centerpiece of dinner.

SALADS CAN BE CREAMY OR DRESSED WITH A VINAIGRETTE

Potato salads can be served warm or cool. Use creamy

mayonnaise-based dressings on chilled potatoes for cold salads. Vinaigrettes are versatile—use them for warm or cool potato salads. For a warm salad, I may cook the potatoes at the same time as the other ingredients and assemble the salad warm for a quick supper dish that needs only to be spooned over crunchy lettuces and served with a crusty bread.

Choose low-starch potatoes that won't get mushy when mixed in salads.



Stir it up. For even cooking and to prevent sticking, give potatoes and vegetables an occasional stir while they're roasting.

A sum that's greater than its parts. Roasted Vegetable & Potato Salad can be a meal unto itself, served warm or cool.





Roasted Vegetable & Potato Salad with Oregano Relish & Feta

With its sweet roasted vegetables, this salad can be served warm or cool. *Yields 6 cups; serves four to six.*

1½ lb. Red Bliss potatoes, cut in rough ¾-inch cubes (about 6 cups)
1 medium eggplant, cut into 2-inch sticks ½ inch thick
1 red bell pepper, sliced thin, slices cut in half crosswise
1 yellow bell pepper, sliced thin, slices cut in half crosswise
1 lb. okra, bias-cut into ½-inch slices (about 2 cups)
1 small sweet onion (such as Vidalia), sliced ¼ inch thick
1 head garlic, cloves smashed and peeled
2 Tbs. olive oil
¼ cup chopped fresh parsley
½ tsp. salt; more to taste
Freshly ground black pepper to taste
1 cup crumbled feta cheese (about 5 oz.)

FOR THE RELISH:

2 Tbs. chopped fresh oregano
2 Tbs. chopped fresh parsley
2 Tbs. snipped fresh chives
2 Tbs. chopped scallions
¼ cup lime juice
¼ cup honey
¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil

Heat the oven to 375°F. In a very large roasting pan or ovenproof skillet, toss the potatoes, eggplant, peppers, okra, onion, and garlic with the olive oil, parsley, salt, and pepper. Roast, stirring often, until evenly browned, 50 to 60 min.

Make the relish while the vegetables are roasting. In a large serving bowl, mix the herbs, scallions, lime juice, and honey, and then whisk in the olive oil in a slow stream. Add the roasted vegetables and the feta and toss. Taste and add more salt and pepper if needed.

Tiny Potatoes with Bacon & Cayenne-Toasted Pecans

This salad tastes best when the potatoes are tossed with the hot bacon dressing and left to sit for an hour while the flavors develop. You can reheat it to serve it warm; I like it best that way. *Yields 6 cups; serves four to six.*

FOR THE PECANS:

½ cup pecan pieces
¼ tsp. salt
⅛ tsp. cayenne
1 tsp. unsalted butter, melted

FOR THE POTATO SALAD:

2 lb. fingerlings or tiny new waxy potatoes
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

FOR THE DRESSING:

5 strips bacon
½ cup minced scallion
¼ cup dry sherry
¼ cup apple-cider vinegar
1 tsp. mustard seeds, crushed
1 Tbs. honey
2 Tbs. chopped fresh parsley
½ cup canola oil

Toast the pecans. Heat the oven to 350°F. In a small bowl, toss together the pecans, salt, cayenne, and butter. Spread this mixture on a baking sheet and toast until browned, about 15 min. Set aside to cool.

In a large pot, cover the potatoes with salted water. Bring to a boil and cook until the potatoes are tender,



Potatoes are mild companions that bring out the best in the ingredients with which they're paired.

A fork makes quick work of juicing a lemon, and mixing the dressing in the serving bowl means there will be fewer dishes to wash.



Land and sea. Shrimp, crabmeat, and sweet corn make an easy and satisfying main-dish potato salad.

15 to 20 min. Drain and pan-dry them. When they're cool enough to touch, slice or halve them (depending on their size). Set aside.

Make the hot bacon dressing. Sauté the bacon in a deep skillet over medium heat until crispy. Transfer the bacon to paper towels to drain, leaving the bacon fat in the pan. When the bacon is cool enough to handle, chop it and set it aside. Pour all but 1 tsp. of the fat from the pan, add the scallion and sauté over medium heat until softened, 4 to 5 min. Remove the pan from the heat and whisk in the sherry, vinegar, mustard seeds, honey, and parsley; combine well. Whisk in the oil in a slow stream.

Pour the warm dressing over the potatoes, sprinkle in the bacon, and toss gently to coat well. Let the potatoes rest for about 1 hour so the flavors can deepen. Toss in the pecans, taste, and add salt and pepper if needed.

Potato Salad with Seafood & Sweet Corn

This salad is best prepared ahead of time so that the flavors can blend. *Yields 6 cups; serves four to six.*

- 1 lb. Yellow Finn potatoes
- 2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
- $\frac{2}{3}$ cup mayonnaise
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup finely chopped dill pickle
- 2 Tbs. finely chopped sweet onion (such as Vidalia)
- 1 tsp. Tabasco
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped fresh dill
- Kernels from 2 medium ears yellow or white corn, cooked (about 1 cup)
- $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. shrimp, peeled, deveined, cooked, and chopped (about 1 cup)
- 6 oz. backfin crabmeat (about 1 cup)
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

In a large pot, cover the potatoes with salted water. Bring to a boil and cook until the potatoes are tender, 15 to 20 min. Drain and pan-dry them. Refrigerate them until you're ready to assemble the salad.

In a large serving bowl, combine the lemon juice, mayonnaise, pickle, onion, Tabasco, and dill. Peel the chilled potatoes and cut them into $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch slices. Add the potatoes to the bowl, along with the corn, shrimp, crabmeat, salt, and pepper and toss gently until well combined with the dressing. Taste and add salt and pepper if needed.

Dorette Snover, a food writer, makes her potato salads in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. ♦