



Waxy or mealy? Choose spuds wisely

At a holiday dinner, my daughter used russets to make mashed potatoes. I always thought russets were for baking. Am I wrong?

Russets, also known as Idahos or “bakers,” are good for lots of things. High in starch and low in moisture, these “mealy” potatoes bake well and yield fluffy mashed potatoes. And, they don’t get too brown before they are thoroughly cooked when deep-fried.

Low-starch, high-moisture or “waxy” potatoes include round reds and round whites. They’re great for boiling, roasting and frying because they retain their shape better after cooking and they brown quicker than a mealy potato. That makes them a better choice for scalloped potatoes, pan-fried potatoes or potato salad. They can be used for mashed potatoes, too, but they won’t turn out as fluffy. In fact, they might be slightly gummy.

New potatoes also generally fall into the waxy category. Although new potatoes are officially a young potato of any variety, most new potatoes sold are young round red potatoes. New potatoes have light skin, almost parchment-like, that peels easily. They’re best boiled, steamed or roasted.

Long white potatoes look similar to russets, but have a medium starch content. This

makes them versatile — they can be baked, mashed, boiled, fried — you name it. And if you refrigerate any type of potato, it will become more “waxy” because some of the starch will convert to sugar. So if you refrigerate potatoes to slow sprouting, take them out several days before you use them to allow the sugar to convert back to starch.

Not sure if you’ve got mealy or waxy potatoes? Here’s a tip from “On Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen” by Harold McGee: Mix one part salt to 11 parts water, and dunk the potato in. Mealy potatoes are denser and will sink; waxy ones will float.

Potatoes are America’s most popular vegetable, mainly due to our love affair with french fries. Baked or boiled, a five-ounce potato is a good source of potassium and offers about 130 calories — not including butter or sour cream. On the other hand, 10 french fries (frozen, home-prepared in the oven, less than 2 ounces) will add about 420 calories to your meal. A half-cup of homemade mashed potatoes, prepared with whole milk and butter, has about 110 calories.

Chow Line is a service of Ohio State University Extension and the Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center. Send questions to Chow Line, c/o Martha Filipic, 2021 Coffey Road, Columbus, OH 43210-1044, or filipic.3@osu.edu.



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