



# Potatoes: You say waxy, I say mealy

## What kinds of potatoes are best for boiling, mashing, frying and baking?

Potatoes are versatile creatures, aren't they? They can be cooked just about any way you can think of, and they complement almost any meal.

There are more than 200 kinds of potatoes. Although you won't find all of those varieties at your supermarket, it's easy to get confused about the different sorts of potatoes that are available.

In his classic "On Food and Cooking: The Science and Lore of the Kitchen," Harold McGee explains that potatoes may fall into one of two categories, "waxy" or "mealy" — or somewhere in between. Those terms hardly make the mouth water, but they do offer a good way to discern which potatoes are best for different uses.

"Mealy" potatoes, McGee explains, have more dry starch within their cells, which tend to puff up and separate from each other when cooked. That makes the potato fluffier when cooked — a good thing for baking and mashing. It also makes the potato drier, which is OK, because you generally moisten baked and mashed potatoes with butter, milk or other moisteners. This type is also good for frying potatoes — think of the fluffy interior of a thick-cut french fry. The Russet potato, the most popular potato by far in the U.S., is the classic "mealy" potato.

Instead of separating when cooked,

the cells in "waxy" potatoes, McGee explains, stick together. That's good news when you want a potato to hold its shape after cooking, as you would want for potato salads, boiled potatoes or scalloped potatoes. New potatoes (which are really just young potatoes of any variety), red-skinned potatoes and fingerlings are common varieties of waxy potatoes.

Still other potatoes fall in between mealy and waxy. These all-purpose potatoes have a medium starch content and can be used for, well, just about all purposes. Round and long white-skinned potatoes are usually classified as "all purpose."

Potatoes, particularly those that aren't fried or laden with high-fat trimmings, can be a nutritious component of the diet. They are high in vitamin C and a good source of potassium and vitamin B6. But be careful — they're so well-loved that it's easy to go overboard on them. A small- to medium-sized baked potato, about 5.25 ounces, is plenty for one serving.

More details about potatoes are available from the U.S. Potato Board (<http://www.healthypotato.com> or <http://www.potatoesusa.com>) as well as the Potato Association of America (<http://potatoassociation.org/>) and the Idaho Potato Commission (<http://www.idahopotato.com/>).

*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@cfaes.osu.edu](mailto:filipic.3@cfaes.osu.edu).*



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