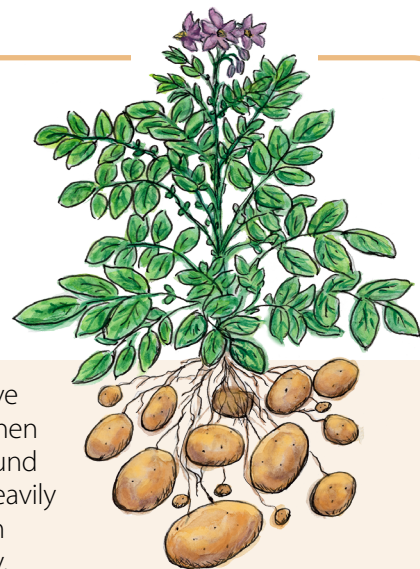


Harvest of the Month at Home

Potatoes



Did You Know

- The edible part of the potato grows underground and is called a tuber. Tubers are not roots; they are part of the plant's stem that stores nutrients to help the plant regrow in the spring. Potato stems and leaves are toxic and are not safe to eat. Potatoes are part of the nightshade family, alongside tomatoes and peppers.
- Potatoes represent the fourth largest crop grown worldwide, just behind corn, rice, and wheat crops. There are over 4,000 varieties of potatoes, making them the most abundant non-grain food product on earth.
- Montana is a leading state in seed potato production. Seed potatoes are sent to other states, such as Idaho and Washington to be planted and grown into full crops. The U.S. is the 5th largest producer of potatoes globally, following China, India, Russia, and Ukraine.
- What we call 'new' potatoes are young potatoes that are harvested before they fully mature.
- Potatoes were originally grown in South America, in the high Andes area around Peru and Bolivia. The first evidence of cultivated potatoes dates to 8000 B.C. That's close to 10,000 years ago! The potato became a global food when European settlers introduced it to Indigenous communities in North America in the 1700's.
- Researchers are growing potatoes on the International Space Station due to their high nutritional content and ease of growing.



Gardening

Potatoes are a great addition to Montana gardens as they can be grown directly in the ground, raised beds, or containers. Plant seed potatoes two weeks before the last frost when soil temperatures are above 40 °F. Be sure to plant only seed potatoes from a reputable source to avoid introducing blight or other diseases. Potatoes do well in direct sunlight and well-drained soil. It is important to note that seed potatoes should be chopped into 1-inch pieces with at least two "eyes" on them before planting. Seed potatoes must

be sown deeply and have proper room to grow when planted both in the ground and containers. Water heavily for the first 8 weeks then begin watering regularly.

New potatoes can be harvested 7-8 weeks after planting. Harvest mature potatoes once the green leaves and stems above ground have dried and turned brown. Potatoes are harvested by digging into the soil around the plant.

Buying Tips

Select potatoes that are firm and fairly clean; a little dirt is okay! Avoid potatoes with a lot of sprouted eyes, wrinkled or wilted skin, discoloration, dark spots, soft areas, cut or bruised surfaces or areas that are greening. Store potatoes in a cool area, 42-48°F, with good ventilation, away from direct sunlight. Refrigeration is not recommended as cold temperatures change the sugar and starch content which changes the texture and flavor. Scrub off dirt and trim any rotted areas when ready to use.

Cooking

Bake. Poke whole potatoes with a fork or knife to release steam. Bake in a 400°F oven for 30-60 minutes, depending on potato variety and size. Potatoes are done when they are soft and easily punctured by a fork. Chop or slice potatoes into smaller pieces for a faster roasting time. Coat chopped potatoes with oil and your choice of spices. Many flavors complement potatoes well including rosemary, sage, parsley, garlic, and onion. Store in the fridge for 3-4 days.

Boil. Boil potatoes for 10-20 minutes, depending on variety and size. Boiled potatoes can be mashed with butter, cream, and spices. Add raw potato pieces to homemade soups and allow enough time for potatoes to cook. Cooked potatoes are a terrific addition to store bought soups or stews.

Microwave. Pierce potato with fork several times, place on a paper towel in the microwave. Cook on high for 4-6 minutes, or until tender.

Freeze. Freezing potatoes causes the water and starch in the potato to separate, resulting in a watery potato once thawed or cooked. Potatoes should be blanched before freezing. Blanching stops the enzymes in the



potatoes from breaking down, which prevents rotting or discoloration. Boil small potatoes for 4 to 6 minutes, large potatoes for 8 to 10 minutes then cool quickly by immersing in an ice bath to stop the cooking process. Ensure potatoes are cool, drain thoroughly, process or leave whole and freeze.

Dry. Potatoes can be dried in dehydrators or in an oven at 200°F. Dehydrators will have specific instructions for temperature and time control based on the design. To dehydrate in an oven wash and dry potatoes. Slice potatoes very thin, chop into cubes or shoestring strips. Spread potatoes onto a baking sheet and bake in a 200°F oven for 8-20 hours, or until fully dry, depending on size and thickness of slices.

Substitute. Water from boiled potatoes can be used to help thicken soups or stews as it contains a lot of starch. Dried and powdered potatoes can be used as a flour substitute in pastas and breads.

Recipes

Cottage Pie

Source: healthyschoolrecipes.com

Servings

6

Ingredients

- 3/4 tsp Garlic, minced
- 1/4 Small onion, *chopped*
- 1/2 cup Carrots, *chopped 1/4 inch dice*
- 1 Tbsp Vegetable Oil
- 1 Tbsp Flour
- 1 lb Ground Beef
- 1 cup Beef Broth
- 1 15oz can Canned Corn
- 1.5 lbs Red Potatoes
- 1 tsp Granulated Garlic
- 1/2 cup Nonfat Milk
- 1 Tbsp Butter
- 1/4 tsp Kosher Salt
- 1/4 tsp Black Pepper
- 1 Tbsp Fresh Parsley, *chopped* (optional)



Preparation

1. Cook and drain ground beef. Set aside.
2. Sauté chopped onions and carrots in oil for 15 minutes, or until the onions begin to brown. Add garlic and saute for about a minute longer.
3. Add the flour and stir over medium heat for about three minutes. Do not burn the flour, but it should brown.
4. Add broth gradually. Add beef, and simmer for 30 minutes.
5. Meanwhile, simmer potatoes in a steam kettle or large pot of water until the largest potatoes are fork-tender, about 30 minutes.
6. Spread meat mixture in greased baking dish.
7. Drain corn and spread over meat mixture.
8. Heat milk to a near boil, being careful not to allow the milk to boil over and stirring occasionally to prevent burning.
9. Add butter, garlic, salt, and black pepper to the milk.
10. Drain potatoes and place into mixing bowl.
11. Whisk in hot milk mixture at the slowest speed, gradually increasing the speed until smooth. (Do not mix too long or the potatoes will cool.)
12. Spread mashed potatoes over corn and meat.
13. Bake in 350°F oven until the center reaches 160°F, around 30 minutes.

Book Nook

- Potato Pants!*, by Laurie Keller
- The Couch Potato*, by Jory John
- The Enormous Potato*, by Aubrey Davis
- The Greatest in the World!*, by Ben Clanton



Dig Deeper

For sources and photo credits along with more recipes, lessons, quick activities, resources, and guides, visit: mtharvestofthemonth.org.

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