



Dear potato, how I love you

Baked, mashed, roasted – and definitely in a Dauphinoise. **Emma Freud** gives spuds star billing

One of the most pressing questions of my youth (once I'd sorted out the critical issue of Donny Osmond vs David Cassidy) was, if you were stuck on a desert island with only one food, what would it be? While my shallower friends opted for Wagon Wheels or Angel Delight, for me the answer had to be potatoes.

On average, each person in Britain eats three spuds every day – but they are so entrenched in the fabric of British food culture that I worry we don't give them enough applause. So here is my own little love letter to potatoes...

Crisp sandwiches As if crisps aren't wonderful enough, it turns out they're even better between bread. When Belfast opened the UK's first crisp sandwich café in 2015, its stock sold out in two hours. Keighley in West Yorkshire hosted the first English version, and a Walkers-sponsored pop-up followed in London. HipChips just opened in Soho selling upmarket crisps with sweet and savoury gourmet dips. At last someone other than Gary Lineker is taking crisps seriously.

Chip butties The ultimate indulgences of carb-on-carb plus butter-on-fat make chip butties so wrong they're perfect. Four ingredients: floury white bap, butter, ketchup and thick-cut chips. Meddle with this formula at your peril.

Mashed potato Reader, I'm not going to lie, I have found it hard to do full justice to this most magnificent of side dishes: mine were always insipid. There, I've said it. However, everything improved once I got my head around this hack: after you've boiled the potatoes, drain them, return to the pan and cover

with a cloth for 10 minutes. This dries them out, so that when you add butter they absorb it and taste buttery, rather than absorbing their cooking water and tasting watery. Tiny step – big difference.

Rösti Easier than you think. Grate a potato, squeeze out all the moisture, add rosemary, salt and pepper, then pan-fry like an omelette until crispy. Once you've flipped it, top with grated Gruyère or a fried egg. It's the new pizza.

Baked I'd thought it impossible to improve on a baked potato. I was wrong. Steam the spud for 20 minutes to infuse with moisture, then bake for 40 minutes in a hot oven to get the perfect combo of fluffy inside and extra crispy outside.

Boiled, squashed and then roasted My favourite new method, this is a real game changer: Boil small potatoes in their skins, then drain and cover with a cloth for a few minutes (you know why). Put each potato into a clean tea towel and squash so it slightly bursts, then place on a baking tray. Drizzle with olive oil, scatter over grated garlic and chopped rosemary, and roast in a hot oven for 20 minutes until golden and a bit crispy: the joy of a boiled spud, the texture of smashed potatoes and the crunch – but not the fat – of a roastie.

Dauphinoise We've arrived at nirvana – layered potato slices with lots of cream, garlic and melted Gruyère – to be served on feast days on my desert island. Classic Dauphinoise tips: 1) If your life is too short to peel potatoes, try potato peeler gloves, which have rough, abrasive palms. You peel by

rubbing, though be warned – they look like murder weapons. 2) Don't demean the Dauphinoise by calling it a 'side' – it's the main event. A glass of wine is the side dish. 3) Wear elasticated trousers when you eat them, for obvious reasons.

And finally – a cooking challenge: some foods are at their peak only when cooked brilliantly using the most expensive ingredients. The potato is not in this category. Your steamed new potatoes and my steamed new potatoes are as good as a chef's steamed new potatoes. But in the name of research, I spent a day searching for the perfect home-cooked chip. This is what happened...

Blumenthal's triple-cooked chips vs my oven chips For my chips, I cut, rinsed and patted the potatoes dry before drizzling with olive oil, laying on a roasting tray and roasting in a hot oven for 40 mins. I served with salt, garlic and rosemary. They took an hour. They were delicious.

To make Heston Blumenthal's triple-cooked chips, I cut, washed, boiled, dried, froze, deep-fried and drained potatoes, then froze, deep-fried and drained them again, before sprinkling with sea salt. I started after breakfast and they were ready when my kids came home from school. They were also delicious.

Moral: homemade chips are delicious. And that's really the point of potatoes – unlike desert-island rescue parties, they rarely let you down.

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The world's greatest salt & vinegar crisp sandwich

This is an easy recipe, but – like Mary Berry's Victoria sandwich – needs to be followed carefully to be perfect. And it really is perfect.

MAKES 4 PREP 20 mins plus soaking COOK 35 mins EASY V

2 medium potatoes
250ml cider vinegar
1 tsp olive oil
8 slices really soft, fresh, sliced white bread (or 4 soft white floury rolls)
salted butter and tomato ketchup, to serve

1 Wash the potatoes and slice thinly. It's tricky to get slices of the right thickness: either use a knife, slicing as thinly as you can without breaking, or a mandolin if you have one. Put the slices in a dish, cover with the vinegar and 1 tsp sea salt, and leave for 20 mins. Heat oven to 180C/160C fan/gas 4. **2** Drain the slices, pat dry gently with a tea towel and put them in a plastic food bag. Add the olive oil and 1 tsp sea salt. Jiggle the bag gently, then arrange the slices on two baking trays. Bake for about 30 mins, but check after 15 mins: you might need to swap the trays' positions or turn them around if one side is browning too quickly. **3** While the potato slices are cooking, butter the bread and spread half the slices with a thin layer of ketchup. When the crisps are beautifully golden, remove from the oven, lay them on kitchen paper and sprinkle with more sea salt. Pile the crisps onto the ketchup-ed slices of bread in a double or triple layer. Add the top layer of buttered bread, cut off the crusts and eat immediately.

PER SANDWICH 293 kcs • fat 11g • saturates 6g • carbs 40g • sugars 6g • fibre 3g • protein 7g • salt 2.8g



Next month: Emma reflects on the importance of teaching her boys how to cook