

# Misty's View of PERFECT MASHED POT



While at my local supermarket, deciding between using yellow fleshed or white fleshed potatoes for a recent Thanksgiving catering, I ran into a stranger who remembered me from last year – same pile

of potatoes, same conundrum – how to make the best mashed potatoes to anchor the traditional family feast. She tapped me on the shoulder enthusiastically and reminded me that I was the “mashed potato expert” she spoke to the last time she made turkey.

Though produce-department fame made me blush, I was interested in learning how well my advice had actually panned out. Triumph was the answer. I had solved her problem. She no longer feared her relatives picking through the mash for lumps, leaving cold clods on the side of the plate, or waving a soupy bowl of spuds onto the next diner.

I was happy to help, remembering with all honesty how many disasters I'd experienced as a novice cook. One time during a prolonged visit to my sister and brother-in-law's place in France, we used a blender to whip up our potatoes thinking that the aeration would make them fluffy. The wallpaper paste that resulted from this innovation horrified us! How was it that we could make exquisite soufflés, but not a basic potato dish?

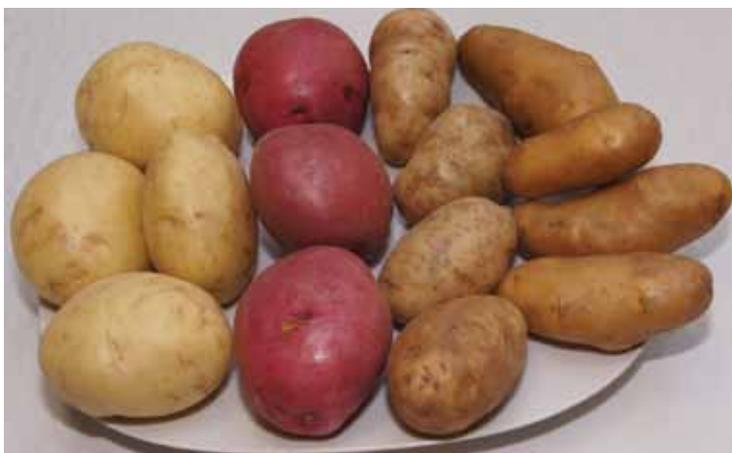
The answer lies on the home front. My mother, whose wedding photo shows her 20-inch waist, was likely one of the earliest

“anti-carb” fanatics alive; we rarely saw potatoes in our house, and if we did they came from a box. She always insisted that as a contemporary of Princess Grace of Monaco, she

was proud to have mostly Metrecal, Diet Fresca and Chanel #5 in the fridge, like Grace apparently did during the early days of her marriage. Low-cal dressing and broiled filet



Misty Ingraham's mother Mary in her wedding gown in 1953, with her 20-inch waist, partly the result of avoiding potatoes. The wedding reception was at the Tamahaac Club in Ancaster.



Yukon Gold, Russet and White potatoes, sourced from Foodland. At right, very local food: Long German Yellow potatoes, exact name unknown, from seed potatoes harvested annually by Charles Hildebrandt from his Escarpment garden.

PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS.

mignon yes; pasta, potatoes and pie no.

So I get it. Assuming that everyone is genetically disposed to mashed-potato-making is very much like assuming that all girls play with dolls and all boys play with action figures. Also, people have gaps in knowledge for all sorts of reasons and for all sorts of things...don't get me started on the acquisition of computer knowledge...

Anyway, here are the life lessons in mashed-potato-making that I learned from my chef husband, the most consistent, reliable and tuber-sensitive expert to whom I owe all of my current knowledge.

## How to Make Perfect Mashed Potatoes

- Start with good potatoes containing few 'eyes' and little exterior damage.
- Yukon Gold potatoes are popular now, but white potatoes have their merits too.
- Peel or carve away (also called turning) the exterior skin, eyes, bruises etc.
- **Equal-sized potatoes are key – aim to create medium-large pieces.**
- Store in cold water prior to cooking to prevent oxidization.
- When ready to cook, place potatoes in a large, heavy-based pot with lid.
- Cover with cold water.
- Add salt until the water tastes like the sea - swish it around and get the taste right.
- Bring to a boil and then turn down the heat to achieve a medium-low boil. Partially cover with the lid.
- Keep an eye on your potatoes, particularly after about 20 minutes. Make sure they are gently boiling not simmering. Test for doneness with the tip of a sharp paring knife.
- The potatoes are done when the knife falls easily from the center of the largest potatoes. Test about five potatoes before deciding to drain them.

### Here comes the crucial part!

- **Drain and return to the pot immediately.** Then mash the potatoes using a good masher and elbow grease. This is the phase where you can prevent lumps. **Get all of the potatoes evenly and thoroughly crushed before adding any liquid ingredients,** since crushing a lump in solution is virtually impossible.
- Pre-heat your milk, butter and seasonings so that they do not cool down your potatoes- a brilliant, yet simple idea.
- Add your liquid mixture a little at a time and wait until the potatoes absorb it before adding any more.
- Don't flood your spuds.
- Taste your mash a few times before deciding whether to adjust the seasoning. Ask a family member to verify the taste too.
- Finely ground white pepper creates an invisible, delicious zip to your mash.
- Freshly-cracked black pepper should be added by the guests themselves as a topping. Adding it to the mash can make it gray or dirty looking.
- Consider adding sour cream to a drier mash for a tangy flavour.
- Be careful to cut your hot liquid ratio down if adding sour cream to finish your potatoes.
- Finally, add fresh herbs like chives, parsley, or tarragon at the last minute since they will quickly become a khaki colour.



The colour inside: both yellow- and white-fleshed potatoes can become perfect mashed potatoes. PHOTO BY MIKE DAVIS.

Once you have nailed making memorable mashed potatoes a few times you can stress less about formal family roasts. So, focus on your spuds at the most crucial moments since everyone loves a tender spoonful of perfect mashed potatoes. Your cooking will become unforgettable too.

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