

The DISH



VICKI RASMUSSEN

FOOD COLUMNIST
vickir@windomnews.com

This week I'm featuring the potato, especially since February just happened to be National Potato Lovers Month. I don't think there are any potato dishes that I don't love. Whether it's the main dish, salad, appetizer or a side dish for dinner, large gatherings, parties or holidays, you just can't go wrong transforming these knobby tuberous delights into something delicious. And the number of ways they can be transformed is unlimited!

Here are some of my favorite ways to transform the potato:

Twice Baked Potatoes

- 6 Russet potatoes
- ½ cup milk, more as needed
- ¼ cup sour cream
- ¼ cup butter, room temperature
- 2 oz. cream cheese, room temperature
- 2 tsp. seasoned salt
- 6 pieces bacon, fried and crumbled
- 1½ cups shredded cheddar cheese, divided
- 2 Tbsp. minced chives, plus more for garnish

Preheat oven to 375 degrees.

Scrub the potatoes clean and poke holes in the skin with a fork. Place potatoes on a baking sheet and bake for 1 hour or until fork tender. Allow to cool slightly. Cut potatoes in half lengthwise. Scoop the potatoes out into a mixing bowl leaving about 1/8th inch of potato along the skin.

Add the milk, sour cream, butter, cream cheese and seasoned salt to the potatoes and mash well until smooth and creamy. Add additional milk if needed to reach the desired consistency. Taste and add additional salt, if needed.

Stir the bacon, ¾ cup of cheddar and chives into the potatoes until combined. Spoon the mashed potatoes evenly into the shells. Top with the remaining cheese and bake for 15-20 minutes or until the potatoes are heated through and the cheese has melted. Sprinkle with additional chives before serving.

Loaded Potato Soup

- 3 lbs. red potatoes, baby size
- 8 oz. bacon, uncooked-diced
- 1 cup sweet onion
- ½ cup carrots, sliced
- 6 cups whole milk
- 3 cups chicken broth
- 2 Tbsp. seasoning salt
- ¾ cup butter
- ¾ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- 2 cups sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
- Kosher salt and black pepper

Rinse, cut and quarter potatoes, keeping the skin

on. Fill a deep pot with water and add the quartered potatoes. Bring to a boil and cook for 10 minutes or until potatoes are tender. Drain the potatoes and set aside.

In a Dutch oven or sauté pan, cook the bacon until crisp. Remove the cooked bacon and crumble. Set aside. Drain the majority of the bacon grease, keeping enough to sauté the onions and carrots, about 2-3 tablespoons worth.

Dice the onions and slice the carrots. Add the diced onions to the pot with the bacon grease, cook over medium heat. As the onions become translucent, add the sliced carrots and cook until tender. This should take a total of 5 minutes. Add in the milk, chicken broth and seasoning, and salt to the onion and carrots. Stir. Cook for about 8 minutes over medium-high heat, stirring often, until mixture is very hot.

In a small saucepan, melt the butter over medium heat. Add the flour and mix well until bubbling to create a roux. Temper the roux by adding a ladle of soup into the skillet. Stir until it's combined. Slowly mix the roux into the soup and stir until thickened, about 4 minutes. Stir in heavy whipping cream and shredded cheese until combined and melted. Add the cooked potatoes and stir. Salt and pepper to taste. Pour into individual bowls.

Garnish with whatever you like, exactly as you'd prepare your loaded baked potato — sour cream, remaining bacon bits, parsley, green onions, more cheese.

Roasted Smashed Potatoes

- 2 lbs. fingerling potatoes, or other smallish potatoes
- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 1 tsp. sea salt
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- ¼ cup minced fresh parsley
- 1 Tbsp. lemon zest
- 1/3 cup Romano or Parmesan, grated

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

Boil the potatoes in a medium-sized pot and let simmer until the potatoes are cooked through. This took me about 10-15 minutes. Drain the potatoes and let them dry on a kitchen towel. Place the potatoes on a baking sheet and drizzle about 2 Tbsp. of olive oil over the potatoes. Stir to make sure that all of the potatoes have been covered with oil.

With the bottom of a glass or a meat tenderizer, gently press the potatoes down to a thickness of about ¼-inch. Drizzle the remaining olive oil and sprinkle the salt over the smashed potatoes. Roast the potatoes for 15 minutes and then flip them over using a spatula or tongs. Return the potatoes to the oven to roast for another 15 minutes or until the edges are crisp.

Meanwhile, prepare the gremolata by mixing the remaining ingredients together in a small bowl. After 30 minutes of total roasting time, remove the potatoes from the oven. Let them sit for 5 minutes and then sprinkle on the gremolata and stir. Serve immediately.

Mushroom Potatoes with Creamy Parmesan and Garlic Sauce

- 2 lbs. baby potatoes or larger yellow/red potatoes cut into about 1-1½-inch pieces
- 1 medium onion
- 3 cups mushrooms, sliced
- ¼ cup Chardonnay white wine, opt.
- 1 clove garlic, pressed/minced
- 1 cup heavy whipping cream
- ¼ cup Parmesan cheese, grated, use more if desired
- Salt
- ½ tsp. pepper
- 1/3 cup chopped, fresh, flat-leaved parsley

Thoroughly scrub the potatoes and rinse in running water. If using larger potatoes, cut them in half or in 4, to make about 1 to 1½-inch pieces. Peel garlic cloves. Place the potatoes in a pot and cover with water. Add about 1 Tbsp. of salt. Bring to a boil and cook for about 15-20 minutes or until the potatoes are easily pierced with a fork.

If using larger sized potatoes that were cut in half or in quarters, add enough salt to make the water a little saltier than soup. Also, take care not to overcook, so the potatoes hold shape in the sauce. Drain the water.

While the potatoes are cooking, wipe down the mushrooms with a wet paper towel. Slice the mushrooms into ¼-inch slices. Peel and dice the onion. To a skillet add a couple tablespoons of olive oil, heat over medium high heat, add onions and

sauté until translucent and slightly browned. Remove to a different plate.

Add a couple more tablespoons of oil, turn the heat to high and sear the mushrooms, stirring often for a couple minutes. Add the wine to the mushrooms, deglaze the skillet by scraping any bits that stuck to it and cook until all moisture evaporates. Add the sautéed onions, cooked potatoes, pressed garlic, heavy cream, salt and pepper; you want to under-season at this point since the Parmesan will add more saltiness in the end. Stir. Taste and adjust the seasoning. Cook for a couple minutes until the heavy cream sauce reduces and coats the potatoes nicely. Add grated Parmesan and stir again. Add chopped parsley, stir again and serve while hot.

Cheesy Potato Pancakes

- 4 cups mashed potatoes
- 2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese
- 1 large egg
- ¼ cup all-purpose flour, or up to ½ cup flour for creamier potatoes
- 2½ Tbsp. chives, chopped
- ½ cup plain bread crumbs
- 2 Tbsp. light olive or canola oil, to sauté
- Sour cream, to serve

Fill a 5-quart pot with water. Add 1 Tbsp. salt and peeled quartered russet potatoes (2 lbs., or about 7 medium potatoes, peeled and quartered). Cook until easily pierced with a fork. Drain well and mash in 4 Tbsp. butter; then let cool to room temperature. Mashed potatoes can be made 1-3 days ahead.

In a large mixing bowl, combine 4 cups mashed potatoes, 2 cups shredded mozzarella cheese, 1 large egg, ¼ cup flour and 2 Tbsp. chopped chives. Use a potato masher to mash the mixture together until well mixed. If the potatoes are too loose to hold a patty shape, add flour — a tablespoon at a time.

Place a heaping tablespoonful of potato mixture between your palms and form into a round, 1/3-inch thick patty. Dredge both sides of the pancake in bread crumbs and set on a cutting board. Repeat with remaining pancakes.

Heat a large non-stick pan over medium heat with enough oil to lightly cover the bottom of the pan. Once oil is hot, add patties in a single layer and sauté 3-4 minutes per side or until golden brown. Repeat with remaining patties, adding more oil as needed.