

# Best Baked Potatoes

The basic baked potato is the start of many easy menus. It can be a vegetable along with a meat, poultry, fish, or bean main dish. Or it can become the main dish when topped with scrambled eggs, leftover chili, cooked vegetables and cheese, or spaghetti sauce. Potatoes are readily available and inexpensive all year long.

## HERE'S WHAT TO DO:

### 1. Choose potatoes labeled for baking.

Plan on 1 medium potato per serving (4 medium potatoes is about 1½ pounds). Each cooked potato is about 1 cup chopped potato with skin, or about ¾ cup without skin. Russets and other baking potatoes have a drier texture and a thicker skin. Red-skinned potatoes tend to have a thinner skin and a more waxy texture. Some yellow and purple potatoes also are good for baking.

### 2. Heat oven to 425°F.

A preheated oven reduces total cooking time.

### 3. Scrub the potatoes under cold running water and pat dry. Prick each potato twice with a fork.

Scrubbing is necessary because potatoes grow in the soil and are touched by many hands. Steam builds up inside the potato as it cooks; pricking with a fork gives that steam a way to escape so the potato doesn't explode in the oven.

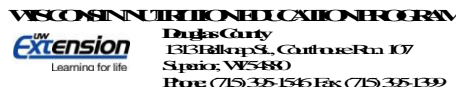
### 4. Place directly on the oven rack and bake about 1 hour or until potatoes are cooked through.

For energy-efficiency, bake at least 4 potatoes at one time. Consider baking more potatoes than needed for one meal and refrigerate the extras for a next-day meal.

### 5. Using oven mitts or tongs, carefully remove the potatoes from the oven.

Serve immediately or let cool, then refrigerate in a plastic bag and use within 3 days. If you don't let the potatoes cool before you put them in the bag, they will "sweat" inside the bag. Placing the potatoes in a sealed bag helps prevent them from drying out.

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