

YUKON GOLD POTATOES

The gold standard for this gratin

Potato gratin is a notoriously heavy side dish, laden with cream and gooey cheese. We wanted to shift the focus of this classic side dish to the potatoes.

We chose Yukon Gold potatoes for their rich flavor and moderate starch content, which helped them hold their shape when cooked.

Tossing the potatoes with fruity, flavorful extra-virgin olive oil heightened the flavor of the potatoes but didn’t overpower them.

For a crisp, cheesy topping, we mixed more olive oil with panko bread crumbs and sprinkled the dish with sharp, salty Pecorino-Romano. For added depth, we added sauteed onions, fresh thyme, and garlic.

OLIVE OIL POTATO GRATIN

Servings: 6-8

Start to finish: 2 hours

2 ounces Pecorino-Romano cheese, grated (1 cup)

1/2 cup extra-virgin olive oil

1/4 cup panko bread crumbs

Salt and pepper

2 onions, halved and sliced thin

2 garlic cloves, minced

1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme

1 cup low-sodium chicken broth

3 pounds Yukon Gold potatoes, peeled and sliced 1/8 inch thick, preferably with a mandoline

Adjust oven rack to upper-middle position and heat oven to 400 F. Grease 13-by-9-inch baking dish. Combine Pecorino, 3 tablespoons oil, panko, and 1/2 teaspoon pepper in bowl; set aside.

Heat 2 tablespoons oil in 12-inch skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add

onions, 1/2 teaspoon salt, and 1/4 teaspoon pepper and cook, stirring frequently, until browned, about 15 minutes. Add garlic and 1/2 teaspoon thyme and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add 1/4 cup broth and cook until nearly evaporated, scraping up any browned bits, about 2 minutes. Remove from heat; set aside.

Toss potatoes, remaining 3 tablespoons oil, 1 teaspoon salt, 1/2 teaspoon pepper, and remaining 1/2 teaspoon thyme together in bowl. Arrange half of potatoes in prepared dish, spread onion mixture in even layer over potatoes, and distribute remaining potatoes over onions. Pour remaining 3/4 cup broth over potatoes. Cover dish tightly with aluminum foil and bake for 1 hour.

Remove foil, top gratin with reserved Pecorino mixture, and continue to bake until top is golden brown and potatoes are completely tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Let cool for 15 minutes. Serve.



Potato gratin.



Crinkle cookies.

A tastier crinkle cookie

Rolled in powdered sugar before baking, chocolate crinkle cookies (often called earthquakes) feature chocolaty fissures that break through the bright white surface during baking. While striking in appearance, these cookies often fall short on taste.

Using a combination of cocoa powder and unsweetened bar chocolate rather than bittersweet chocolate (which contains sugar) certainly upped the intensity, and swapping brown sugar for the granulated created a complex sweetness.

At this point, the cookies had deep, rich flavor, but the exterior cracks were too few and too wide, and the cookies weren’t spreading enough. Using a combination of baking soda and baking powder helped the bubbles produced by the leaveners rise to the surface and burst, leaving fissures, but the cracks gapped.

We had been refrigerating this fluid dough overnight before portioning and baking the cookies, but the cold dough didn’t begin to spread very much until after that dried exterior had formed, forcing the cracks to open wide. The solution was to bake the cookies after letting the dough sit at room temperature for 10 minutes, which was just enough time for the dough to firm up to a scoopable consistency.

CHOCOLATE CRINKLE COOKIES

Servings: 22

Start to finish: 1 hour

1 cup (5 ounces) all-purpose flour

1/2 cup (1 1/2 ounces) unsweetened cocoa powder

1 teaspoon baking powder

1/4 teaspoon baking soda

1/2 teaspoon salt

1 1/2 cups packed (10 1/2 ounces) brown sugar

3 large eggs

4 teaspoons instant espresso powder (optional)

1 teaspoon vanilla extract

4 ounces unsweetened chocolate, chopped

4 tablespoons unsalted butter

1/2 cup granulated sugar

1/2 cup confectioners’ sugar

Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 325 F. Line two baking sheets with parchment paper. Whisk flour, cocoa, baking powder, baking soda, and salt together in bowl.

Whisk brown sugar; eggs; espresso powder, if using; and vanilla together in large bowl. Microwave chocolate and butter in bowl at 50 percent power, stirring occasionally, until melted, 2 to 3 minutes.

Whisk chocolate mixture into egg mixture until combined. Fold in flour mixture until no dry streaks remain. Let dough sit at room temperature for 10 minutes.

Spread granulated sugar in shallow dish. Spread confectioners’ sugar in second shallow dish. Working in batches, drop 2-tablespoon mounds of dough (or use #30 scoop) directly into granulated sugar and roll to coat. Transfer dough balls to confectioners’ sugar and roll to coat; space dough balls evenly on prepared sheets, 11 per sheet.

Bake cookies, 1 sheet at a time, until they are puffed and cracked and edges have begun to set but centers are still soft (cookies will look raw between cracks and seem underdone), about 12 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through baking. Let cookies cool on sheet for 5 minutes, then transfer to wire rack. Let cookies cool completely before serving.



Meatballs and marinara.

For a classic meatballs, turn to the multicooker

It’s hard to find anyone who doesn’t love a bowl of spaghetti topped with meatballs and marinara, but stovetop versions are often messy (between the splattering oil from frying the meatballs and the sputtering tomato sauce), and the sauce requires a long simmering time to develop rich, deep flavor.

We turned to the multicooker for the neatest and most efficient method for making classic meatballs in marinara. Meatloaf mix provided a combination of ground beef, pork, and veal all in one, making our grocery list short without sacrificing flavor.

The meatballs were a bit dry, so we added an egg and a panadea paste of bread and milk for the moisture the meatballs needed, creating tender meatballs that would also hold their shape.

We seared the meatballs until they were crisp and brown; the deep pot of the multicooker kept splattering to a minimum, and the fond made a flavorful foundation for our marinara. We cooked some aromatics, added crushed tomatoes and tomato puree, and returned the meatballs to the pot.

From there, we could either briefly pressure cook the mixture, or leave it unattended to gently cook for the next few hours on the slow cook setting. Either way, we never had to worry about splattering grease or sauce.

The final product was a pot full of flavorful and tender yet firm meatballs in a robust, savory tomato sauce. If you cannot find meatloaf mix, substitute 8 ounces 85 percent lean ground beef and 8 ounces ground pork.

MEATBALLS AND MARINARA

Servings: 4-6

Pressure cook total time: 1 hour

Show cook total time: 4 hours 30 minutes

2 slices hearty white sandwich bread, torn into 1/2 inch pieces

1/4 cup whole milk

1 ounce Parmesan cheese, grated (1/2 cup)

3 tablespoons minced fresh parsley

1 large egg, lightly beaten

6 garlic cloves, minced

Salt and pepper

1 pound meatloaf mix

1 tablespoon extra-virgin olive oil

2 tablespoons minced fresh oregano or 2 teaspoons dried

1 tablespoon tomato paste

1 (28 ounce) can crushed tomatoes

1 (28 ounce) can tomato puree

1 pound spaghetti

1/4 cup chopped fresh basil

Using fork, mash bread and

milk into paste in large bowl. Stir in Parmesan, parsley, egg, half of garlic, 3/4 teaspoon salt, and 1/2 teaspoon pepper. Add meatloaf mix and knead with hands until thoroughly combined. Pinch off and roll mixture into 12 meatballs (about 1/4 cup each).

Using highest saute or browning function, heat oil in multicooker for 5 minutes (or until just smoking). Brown meatballs on all sides, 6 to 8 minutes; transfer to plate.

Add oregano, tomato paste, 1/4 teaspoon salt, and remaining garlic to fat left in multicooker and cook until fragrant, about 1 minute. Stir in tomatoes and tomato puree, scraping up any browned bits. Gently nestle meatballs into sauce, adding any accumulated juices.

To pressure cook: Lock lid in place and close pressure release valve. Select high pressure cook function and cook for 15 minutes.

Turn off multicooker and quick-release pressure. Carefully remove lid, allowing steam to escape away from you.

To slow cook: Lock lid in place and open pressure release valve. Select low slow cook function and cook until meatballs are tender, 3 to 4 hours. (If using Instant Pot, select high slow cook function and increase cooking range to 4 to 5 hours.) Turn off multicooker and carefully remove lid, allowing steam to escape away from you.

Meanwhile, bring 4 quarts water to boil in large pot. Add pasta and 1 tablespoon salt and cook, stirring often, until al dente. Reserve 1/2 cup cooking water, then drain pasta and return it to pot. Add several spoonfuls of sauce (without meatballs) and basil and toss to combine. Add reserved cooking water as needed to adjust consistency. Serve pasta with remaining sauce and meatballs.