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America's test kitchen baked potatoes

When it comes to cooking a perfect baked potato with crispy skin, the traditional oven-baked method can be time-consuming, taking around an hour. The microwave method cooks faster, but the skins often lack crispiness. To achieve both speed and crunchiness, some people use multiple appliances, which can be inconvenient. The air fryer offers a promising solution, providing crispy results without excessive oil usage and in less time than traditional oven-baking. We compared the two methods by testing cooking times, prep times, flavor, texture, convenience, and clean-up for both. Additionally, we considered how long it would take to cook an entire meal using each method. Our findings reveal which approach is best for achieving the ultimate baked potato. Read more: [The Most Useless Cooking Utensils, According To Chefs](#) [The Idaho Potato Commission recommends baking potatoes at 400°F \(200°C\) in a traditional non-convection oven.](#) To determine doneness, we used internal temperature as a metric, aiming for 210°F (99°C). We also avoided wrapping potatoes in aluminum foil, opting instead for preheating the oven and baking sheet to 400°F. In an air fryer, the IPC suggests setting the temperature to 400°F and adjusting cooking times accordingly. When cooking baked potatoes in an air fryer, it's essential to follow the same process as traditional oven baking, ensuring consistency across methods. Most recipes recommend preheating the air fryer to 400°F, which is also the temperature used for oven baking. Regardless of the method, aim for an internal temperature of 210°F. You can skip using aluminum foil in the air fryer, especially if you want a crispy potato skin. For this test, we preheated the air fryer to 400°F and baked the potatoes, turning them halfway through cooking until they reached 210°F. The air fryer preheated quickly, taking only 4 minutes, while the oven took around 25 minutes. The main difference between the two appliances is their size and heating mechanisms. The air fryer's smaller compartment heats up faster due to its convection heating system, giving it a 21-minute head-start over the traditional oven. To prepare the potatoes, we selected roughly equal-sized spuds (about 12 ounces each) and followed a consistent process for both oven and air fryer baking. We soaked the potatoes in lightly salted water for half an hour, scrubbed them clean, and dried them before pricking them with a fork to vent steam while they cook. Then, we rubbed the potatoes with olive oil and generously seasoned them on all sides with kosher salt. While it's not necessary to oil the potatoes when using the air fryer, doing so helps the seasoning stick. If you want to minimize oil use, consider applying a light coating of oil. To prepare potatoes for cooking in either an oven or an air fryer, you can use a gentle touch with an oiled paper towel and cooking spray or brush oil onto them with a pastry brush. The preparation steps are the same for both methods. However, when it comes to cooking time, there are notable differences. The IPC suggests cooking potatoes in an air fryer for about 30-40 minutes and in an oven for 50-60 minutes to achieve the desired internal temperature. In a test, air fryer potatoes were cooked for 30 minutes, paused and turned after 20 minutes, and then cooked for an additional 8 minutes to reach 210 Fahrenheit, totaling 38 minutes. In contrast, oven-baked potatoes were cooked for 50 minutes, reaching 210 Fahrenheit after flipping them over halfway through. The total cooking time, including preheating, was 42 minutes in the air fryer and 1 hour 15 minutes in the oven. While both methods may seem time-consuming for a quick meal, the air fryer saves over 30 minutes. Another significant difference lies in the potato's skin texture. The air fryer produces an extra crispy finish, with a crunchier skin that is delicate and crackly, similar to the top of a perfectly baked brownie. In contrast, oven-baked potatoes have a moderately crunchy skin when cooked without foil. The air fryer-cooked potato also developed a richer, more roasted skin flavor compared to the oven-baked one. The interior texture of the potatoes differed as well, with the air fryer producing a unique texture that was noticeable after taste-testing both methods side-by-side. Overall, while both cooking methods can produce delicious results, the air fryer offers advantages in terms of cooking time and texture, making it a viable option for those seeking a crispy exterior and a flavorful interior. The interior texture of oven-baked and air-fried potatoes differs slightly, despite both being cooked through. The air-fryer-cooked potato was more tender and moist than its oven-baked counterpart, while it still had a fluffy but drier texture compared to the latter. This variation might be due to the longer cooking time required for the oven-baked potato to reach optimal temperature, leading to reduced moisture content. Interestingly, there's no noticeable flavor picked up by the potatoes from the air fryer itself, only the natural sweetness of freshly baked potatoes. However, when cooking multiple ingredients together in an air fryer, flavors may combine, so it's essential to choose compatible flavors. Furthermore, avoiding certain cooking sprays and low smoke point oils can minimize the risk of burnt or toasted flavors. In terms of convenience, traditional ovens with two racks often provide more versatility for cooking a complete meal simultaneously, especially for larger groups. For instance, baking potatoes, chicken breasts, and broccoli in separate compartments on an oven rack may be more efficient than the air fryer's limited capacity. If you're cooking for a small group, an air fryer can be a great option - it's faster and more efficient than traditional oven methods. However, if you're cooking for a larger crowd, the time difference may not be as significant. For example, cooking potatoes in an air fryer takes about 42 minutes, while chicken breasts take around 20 minutes, and broccoli takes about 10 minutes. This adds up to around an hour and 12 minutes total. On the other hand, traditional oven methods can cook all of these foods at once in just about an hour. When it comes to baked potatoes, air fryers have a clear advantage - they produce crispy, flavorful skin that's hard to replicate with traditional oven methods. Additionally, air fryers require less oil and are easier to clean up after use. However, for larger gatherings or holiday meals, traditional ovens may still be the best option due to their ability to cook multiple dishes at once. Read the original article on [Mashed](#). Baked potatoes are a dry, floury variety of spud that's perfect for stuffing because they contain around 20-22% starch - more than other types like Yukon Golds or Red Bliss. This high starch content means the potatoes can absorb water from inside during baking, turning into the fluffy texture we love. You might've heard that you need to prick potatoes before baking them so steam doesn't build up and cause a mess, but our tests showed that even without pricking, 40 potatoes didn't explode - though it's still a good idea to be safe! What's more interesting is figuring out exactly when a potato reaches the perfect dry and fluffy stage. We experimented with different temperatures, using an instant-read thermometer to check the internal temperature of the potatoes. Our results showed that at around 200-205 degrees Fahrenheit, the potatoes were perfectly cooked - light and fluffy from edge to center. However, if you let them sit for too long before cutting them open, they can become gummy and lose their texture. We even weighed the potatoes to confirm this: the ones left to sit before being cut open weighed more than those opened immediately after baking! Now that we know exactly when our potatoes are cooked through, we're looking into ways to speed up the process - like microwaving them. The worst method for cooking potatoes involves using a microwave alone or combined with an oven, resulting in unevenly cooked and often gummy spuds. This occurs because microwaves heat foods very unevenly, leading to some parts of the potato being fully cooked while others remain rock-hard. Instead, baking potatoes at 400 degrees Fahrenheit can take between one hour to one hour and twenty minutes to cook through. To speed up this process, increasing the oven temperature to 500 degrees Fahrenheit might seem like a solution; however, it causes the outer portion of the potato to overbrown and almost char in spots, leading to a slightly burned flavor. A better approach is to crank down the oven temperature notch by notch until finding the sweet spot at 450 degrees Fahrenheit for 45 minutes or so. This yields a soft and light interior with nicely browned skin. To crisp up the potatoes further, applying oil after they're cooked allows moisture to escape and results in deep brown and crispy skins. Another key variable is seasoning. Brining the potatoes before baking can deliver fantastic flavor on the skins but adds extra time to the method. Instead, simply wetting the raw potatoes with salt or dunking them in salty water achieves similar results without adding much more time. Baking the potatoes on a rack set in a rimmed baking sheet also helps prevent drips from staining the oven and allows for even air circulation. With these tweaks, perfect baked potatoes are achieved: crisp on the outside, light and fluffy within, making them ideal with just a pat of butter or sour cream. The quest for the perfect baked potato began when I wanted a showstopping side dish or main course. To achieve this, I experimented with simple toppings while baking potatoes at different temperatures and methods. The ideal result was a uniformly fluffy interior and crispy skin. After testing various approaches, including microwaving, pressure-cooking, and high-heat baking, the sweet spot turned out to be baking at 450 degrees for 45 minutes. This method produced potatoes with a light and fluffy interior and nicely browned skin. To take it to the next level, brushing the potatoes with oil after they're fully cooked and then crisping them in the oven resulted in a crispy exterior. The perfect baked potato recipe is now available, along with three delicious topping options - creamy egg salad, smoked trout, and herbed goat cheese. There's nothing quite like cooking potatoes, but are you prepared for them? While they're a staple in many cultures, potatoes can be tricky to cook. You need the right tools to achieve that perfect dish. The right kitchen tool depends on the type of potato dish, your personal preference, and how much time you have. For instance, using a ricer is great for mashed potatoes, while grating your own flaky latkes or having a loaded baked potato requires different tools altogether. Using the right tools makes all the difference in getting the best out of this favorite ingredient. The world of potato peeling is vast, with various tools designed to simplify the process. Recipes that remove skins include roasted potatoes and boiled potatoes. Each variety has unique skin texture and taste, making it a matter of preference where a vegetable peeler can assist. Additionally, one can use the peeler for treat-making from potato skins themselves. The paring knife is often seen as redundant when paired with a vegetable peeler. However, some consider the paring knife an essential tool for cooking potatoes. Its advantages include a sharp blade and short handle, making it ideal for cutting fruit and soft-skinned ingredients. The thickness of cuts and accuracy with a paring knife are unmatched. For those seeking an atypical way to slice potatoes, the potato slicing rack is a great option. This mini-slicing station creates a beautiful, fanned effect and is perfect for Hasselback potatoes. With its studs to keep spuds secure and wooden base, it's a valuable addition to any kitchen. When it comes to preparing potatoes and beyond, few tools outdo the mandoline slicer. Its smallish blade attached to a rectangular base makes it easy to slice vegetables thinly and uniformly. Available in various thicknesses and price points, some cheese graters also offer a built-in mandoline slicer feature. The OXO brand offers multiple ways to mandoline with their tool. There are numerous ways to use thinly sliced potatoes, making it a better question what can't you do with mandoline slicers and potatoes for? Some common preparations include potato thins, potatoes au gratin, and even potato chips. You don't have to stick to traditional potatoes; sweet potatoes will also work well on a mandoline for different dishes like chips, pavé, or scalloped preparation. For mashing potatoes, you can use a food mill, which is a kitchen tool that looks like a pot with an attached handle. It helps mash, sieve, and grind foods. You can prepare applesauce, jelly, and even potato-based dishes using it. Boiled potatoes are soft enough to be transformed into the desired consistency with a food mill. Another option for transforming potatoes into mashed consistency is the potato ricer. It's a pot with two handles that pushes the cooked potatoes through a grate. The ideal consistency of mashed potatoes depends on choosing the right ricer for your taste. Potato ricers are great for making gnocchi, which require a fine and light texture. The humblest of tools can also prove to be very useful when cooking potatoes - a common metal cheese grater. For instance, you can use it to make homemade grated hash browns or latkes using Yukon potatoes. Pancakes have always been an essential part of Jewish cuisine, especially during Passover. French Fry Cutter The ideal French fry cutter is a specialized tool consisting of a slot to insert potatoes, a handle for pushing down, and a metal grid that crushes the potato. The stainless steel variety offers better results than others. In addition to its classic restaurant potato varieties, it also comes in several thickness settings, allowing users to choose their preferred French fry size. The price range for this tool is varied, but you can find something suitable at multiple levels. Fork A fork's significance in cooking potatoes cannot be overstated. Different types of forks are available, each designed to improve the potato-cooking process. While high-end forks offer specific features like three-pronged stainless steel forks, a standard four-pronged fork works for most tasks, such as forming gnocchi or testing potato doneness. Hand Mixer The hand mixer is an incredibly versatile tool with numerous applications beyond mashed potatoes. Its ability to whip, mix, and fluff makes it an indispensable kitchen companion for preparing various dishes. The texture may not be perfect compared to specialized tools like a ricer or food mill, but the result is close enough in terms of time and effort considerations. Potatoes are a versatile ingredient used in various dishes, including potato croquettes, Korokke, and tapas. They can also be prepared as a simple side dish by baking or boiling them. For baked potatoes, aluminum foil is often used to wrap the spud and retain heat. However, some argue that it steams rather than bakes the potato due to insulation. A strainer is useful for draining boiled water from mashed potatoes, but not all strainers are suitable for mashing potatoes, which can be a messy task. A great wooden spoon is an essential tool in potato preparation and can be used for various tasks such as cutting wedges, sautéing potatoes, or mixing ingredients. It's a versatile tool with no specific design requirements. For those who value practicality over perfection, an egg-shaped or round spoon crafted from walnut, beechwood, or olive wood is a sensible pick. Environmentally conscious cooks might instead prefer using a bamboo spoon to stock their kitchen arsenal. IKEA also provides wooden spoons in various designs, enabling users to test different styles and features without breaking the bank.