

Michigan potatoes will star in these recipes

Michigan's potato industry has been growing the past few years — so much so that it is now the ninth largest potato-producing state in the nation.

In 1984, 55,000 acres in Michigan were planted in potatoes, according to Roy H. Kaschky, executive director of the Michigan Potato Industry Commission in Lansing.

Michigan's record year was 1959, when 274,000 acres were planted. Around the turn of the century Michigan was one of the leading three or four states in acreage and production year after year and some years was ranked No. 2 in those categories.

DURING THE Depression, Michigan was still producing about as many potatoes annually as a third of a century earlier, on roughly the same amount of acreage.

But after World War II the state's potato industry went into a decline, failing to stay up to date as other states became more aggressive in their potato production and marketing.

Gradually, however, leaders in the Michigan industry realized they were losing their markets and recognized the need for a more progressive approach. This attitude led to the creation of the Michigan Potato Industry Commission in 1970 to promote Michigan potatoes and support research to improve productivity and quality.

The research investment of the Commission has paid dividends.

THE MICHIGAN potato crop in 1982 totaled 1.23 billion pounds. In 1983, with slightly less favorable growing weather, production fell slightly to just over 1.20 billion pounds.

But that's still more than one-half the production of 1904, Michigan's record year, and the figure was achieved on about one-sixth the potato acreage of the early 1900s.

CAJUN SMOKED FISH 'N' TATERIES

4 large Michigan baking potatoes (about 10 ounces each)
1/4 cup coarsely chopped mushrooms
1/2 cup minced celery
2 tbsp. each minced green pepper and onion
6 tbsp. melted butter or margarine
1/4 cup half and half or milk
1/2 cup shredded Cheddar cheese
2 cups flaked smoked fish (salmon, trout, or whatever is available)
Salt and cayenne pepper, to taste
Paprika, for garnish

Wash potatoes, pierce skin and bake in 400 degree oven 50 to 60 minutes, until tender. In skillet saute mushrooms, celery, pepper, and onions in 2 tablespoons of the butter. Cut cooked

potatoes in half lengthwise; scoop out pulp leaving enough to make a sturdy shell. Mash pulp with remaining 4 tablespoons butter and the half and half until fluffy. Stir in vegetables and cheese. Fold in fish. Season with salt and cayenne. Spoon mixture into potato shells. Place on baking sheet; bake in preheated 350 degree oven 10 minutes or until tops are lightly browned. Dust with paprika. (Makes 8 stuffed potato halves).

*Note: One 15 1/2-oz. can salmon, drained, or other canned or cooked fish can be substituted for the smoked fish. Season with a dash of liquid smoke.

CRISPY POTATO BALLS

2 cups unseasoned mashed Michigan potatoes (1 pound)
1 egg
3 tablespoons sliced green onions
2 tablespoons chopped parsley
2 tablespoons fennel seeds
1 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
2 to 3 ounces sharp cheddar cheese, cut into 1/4-in. cubes
Vegetable oil for deep frying

In bowl combine all ingredients except cheese and oil. Mix to blend thoroughly. Cover and chill 1 hour. Form generous 1 1/2 tablespoons of the potato mixture around one of the cheese cubes. Repeat with remaining potato mixture and cheese cubes. Chill 1 hour. In heavy 2 quart saucepan heat 2 inches of oil to 350 degrees. Deep fry potato balls a few at a time to maintain temperature just until lightly browned and crisp, about 2 minutes. Drain with slotted spoon. Serve hot. Makes 18 balls. (8-9 appetizer servings)

Note: Cooked potato balls may be reheated on baking sheet in 375-degree oven until crisp and heated through, about 10 minutes.

CAROL'S POTATO CUT-OUTS

3 medium Michigan potatoes
1 tsp. salt
1 tsp. paprika
1/4 tsp. pepper
12 medium mushrooms, halved
Radishes
Boiling water
Vegetable oil for deep frying
1 tsp. onion salt
Steak Tartare*
Watercress sprigs

Slice potatoes 1/4 inch thick. With small cookie cutters, cut centers out of potato slices. (Both the cut-outs and the "frames" will be used.) In 3 quart saucepan cover potato pieces with boiling water. Stir in salt. Cover and cook about three minutes, just until potatoes are barely tender. Drain immediately in strainer or colander. In heavy deep saucepan heat 3 inches oil to 375 degrees. Add a portion of the potato pieces (do not overcrowd). Fry until browned, stirring once or twice, about 5 minutes. Drain on paper toweling. Keep warm. Repeat with remaining potato pieces with seasoning mixture. Place Steak Tartare in serving dish. Serve with hot potato pieces and mushrooms. Garnish with watercress and radishes. Serve immediately. (8 appetizer servings)

*STEAK TARTARE

1 lb. lean steak, ground twice
1/4 cup finely chopped onion
3 tbsp. drained capers

1 tsp. salt
1/4 tsp. pepper
1 egg yolk in half-shell

Lightly mix all ingredients except egg yolk. Form into mold. Make indentation in top; set in egg yolk in half-shell.

ANOTHER FAVORITE POTATO SALAD

1 1/2 lbs. (4 to 5 medium) Michigan potatoes scrubbed
3 hard cooked eggs, shelled and chopped
1/4 cup sliced celery
1/2 cup sour cream
3 tsp. white vinegar
1 tbsp. prepared mustard
1/2 tsp. pepper
Salt to taste
Butter lettuce
Paprika

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Place potatoes in Dutch oven or large saucepan with tight fitting lid. Add 1 to 2 inches boiling water. Cover tightly and cook over high heat 30 to 40 minutes until potatoes are tender when pierced with fork. Drain, cool, and peel. Cut potatoes in 1/2 inch cubes. Place in large bowl with eggs, celery, onions, and parsley. In small bowl whisk together mayonnaise, sour cream, vinegar, mustard, and pepper. Toss gently with potato mixture. Mix in salt, cover and chill. To serve, line individual dishes with lettuce. Fill with potato mixture. Dust with paprika.

To vary, add one or two of the following before tossing with dressing:

1 tsp. dill weed
1/2 cup halved cherry tomatoes
1/2 cup shredded carrots
1/4 cup crumbled crisp bacon
1/2 cup sliced green olives
1/2 cup shredded sharp Cheddar cheese
1/2 cup sliced radishes
1/2 cup green or red pepper
1/4 cup crumbled blue cheese
1/2 cup chopped cucumber
1/4 cup chopped dill pickles

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WALNUT BROWNIE CUPCAKES

2 1-oz. squares unsweetened chocolate
1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
2 tsp. baking powder
1/4 tsp. salt
1/2 cup butter or margarine, softened
1 1/2 cups granulated sugar
2 eggs
1 tsp. vanilla
1/2 cup milk
1/2 cup chopped walnuts

Melt chocolate over hot water; cool. Sift flour with baking powder and salt. Cream butter with sugar until light and fluffy. Beat in eggs, one at a time. Mix in vanilla and chocolate. Blend in flour mixture alternately with milk. Stir in walnuts. Spoon batter into 2 1/2-inch muffin pans lined with paper cupcake liners, filling about 3/4 full. Bake at 375 degrees for 20 to 25 minutes or just until cake tops spring back when touched lightly. Cool on wire racks. Makes about 18 cupcakes. If desired, frost with a chocolate buttercream frosting and top with walnut halves and large pieces.

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