

# How to Make a Great Hamburger



**The Definitive Guide to Making Hamburgers with  
Recipes and Techniques**

**A Prepared Pantry Publication**

## Here's how to make a great burger!

Americans love their burgers. On average, they eat three a week. But often burgers are mediocre, their mediocrity disguised under a cover of lettuce, tomato, and condiments. The burger should be the star of the show—tender, juicy and with great taste. How do you make great burgers?



In this e-book, we'll tell you how. You'll find the techniques for great burgers, the do's and don'ts. You'll find ten of our favorite toppings. You'll learn how to stuff burgers and how to season them better. We'll even tell you how to make your own hamburger buns—on the grill no less—and how to make French fries to go with your burgers. And we'll talk about food safety.

You'll be making great burgers.

*Dennis & MerriAnn Weaver & Company*

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## Burgers

### Burgers don't have to be plain—check these ideas

It's fun to be creative with burgers. Surprise your guests and make Cheese-Stuffed Burgers, Buttery Onion Burgers, or Tex-Mex Burgers. We'll give you eight great burger ideas to get you started.

**Make Cheese-Stuffed Burgers.** Instead of placing the cheese on top of the burger, use a burger press like our Burger Buddy to form two thinner patties then place the cheese between the patties. Mold the edges together to trap the cheese as it melts.

**Make Tex-Mex Burgers.** Toss your ground beef with diced green chilies, chopped cilantro, and shredded Monterey jack cheese before forming the patties.



**Make Cheese and Herb Burgers.** Make burgers as for Tex-Mex burgers but instead of chilies, use your favorite herbs.

**Make Buttery Onion Burgers.** Freeze a cube of butter then grate it as you would cheese. Mix the grated butter, a chopped sweet onion, and your choice of spices into your ground beef before forming the patties. (To keep the butter hard, place the grater and a plate or cutting board in the freezer before use. Make sure that the meat is ice cold.)

**Make Blue Cheese and Bacon Burgers.** Mix crumbled blue cheese into the ground beef. Cook and top with crisply fried bacon. If you are cooking on the grill, try wrapping the bacon strips around the burger patties before cooking. Secure the strips with toothpicks.

**Make Italian Burgers.** Mix one part ground beef with one part ground Italian sausage. Form patties. Season with additional oregano and basil.

**Make Bacon Burgers.** Microwave bacon until it is partly done. With kitchen shears, snip the bacon into bits. Mix the bacon bits into your ground beef.

**Make Swiss and Mushroom Burgers.** Make a cheese-stuffed burger as above but with Swiss cheese. Top the burger with sautéed mushrooms.

**Chef's note:** Lean and extra lean burger is often too lean to make flavorful, moist burgers. By adding grated cheese or butter to the burger before forming, you are adding more fat and moisture to the meat and helping compensate for the lack of fat in the meat. Diced chilies, onions, or mushrooms and spices add flavor.

### Eleven Secrets for Great Burgers

**1. Start with the right meat.** Buy your meat from a butcher you trust. Avoid the lean and extra lean burger which is great for casseroles but too lean for burgers—you need the fat for flavor and juice. Your meat should be fresh. Ask the butcher when it was ground and avoid meat that was not ground in the last few hours.

**2. Don't handle the meat unnecessarily.** Too much handling makes for tough burgers. Break a section of meat off and form the burgers with as little handling as possible. If you are mixing seasonings into the meat, toss the meat gently with your fingers to disperse the seasonings.

**3. Make the burgers the right size.** Remember, they shrink while cooking. Three-quarters of an inch thick on the edges and slightly thinner in the middle is just about right for most of us. A hamburger press like our Burger Buddy is a nice way to form burgers without handling them too much. Make the burger thicker than necessary and then gently press the center to form a concave patty.

**4. Start out with a clean, well-oiled grill.** Burnt food particles will taint your burger and make it stick.

**5. Cook at the right temperature.** You want your grill or pan to be at medium high, hot enough to sear the meat and seal in the juices.

**6. Avoid the urge to press.** Yes, you see others pressing their burgers with the spatula but doing so forces the juices from the meat. Again, it's the juices that make your burgers moist and flavorful.

**7. Turn 'em once.** Years ago, I worked a grill in Alaska. The chef taught me to never turn the steaks more than once—doing so lets the juices run out and dries out the steak. The same goes for a burger.

**8. Avoid the urge to overcook.** A well-charcoaled burger is going to be tough and dry. That same chef taught me to tell how done a steak was by poking it with my finger. (The meat becomes firmer as it cooks.) You can do the same with burgers (and chicken). After the first cookout, you'll be pro. No more over-cooked burgers or burgers torn apart to see how red they are in the middle.

**9. Season your meat before cooking.** You'll find that your burger will taste much better if every morsel is seasoned, not just the outside. Add 3/4 teaspoon salt and 1/4 teaspoon pepper to every pound of burger and knead it in gently.

**10. Cook your burgers on medium high heat.** You want to sear the burgers, make a bit of a crust, and seal in the juices. Too high and you'll burn the outside before the burger is done; too low and too much of the juice will drip out.

**11. Try mixing grated cheese into the meat for cheeseburgers.** You'll get a burst of cheese in every bite, the cheese won't drip down into the grill, and it takes less cheese to make a cheesy burger.

## International Stuffed Burgers

We started with two foods that we liked—nachos and Thai stir fries. We took the ingredients from each and worked them into stuffed burgers: onions, Monterey jack, and olives in the Mexican burgers; peanuts, bean sprouts, and Thai sweet chili in the Thai burgers. They were both very good.

We used the bean sprouts as an accompaniment to the Thai burgers. We weren't sure how the peanuts would work out. We chopped them very coarsely, just a cut or two on each nut and worked them right into the burger. They were a great addition and maybe made the burgers.

But consider this a method, a template, as you build your own stuffed burgers.

### Nacho Burgers

Merri Ann loves nachos, really loaded nachos with everything from olives to red onions. So we loaded up some burgers. Here's how:

We started with lean ground beef. Unless we're making stuffed burgers, we use 80 percent lean meat; leaner meat is too dry. With stuffed burgers use the leanest ground you can buy; the components add extra fat. Since we were going to load these up and didn't want them crumbly, we set aside an egg to toss with the meat.

This combination makes terrific burgers.

#### Ingredients

2 pounds lean ground beef  
1 large egg, whisked with a fork  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/4 teaspoon pepper  
about 20 medium black olives, chopped  
1 medium red onion, chopped  
3/4 cup grated Monterey jack cheese  
1/2 cup salsa

#### Directions

Gently toss these ingredients together until mixed. Don't handle more than necessary. Form nice flat burger patties with a hamburger press. Cook them until done, turning only once and without pressing the burgers with the spatula while cooking. Turning only once will trap more of the juices in the burger; pressing with the spatula forces the juices from the meat.

#### To assemble the burgers, we used the following:

shredded lettuce  
tomato slices  
guacamole  
bean dip



Spread the bottom bun with bean dip and then cover with lettuce. Top with the burger patty. Smother the patty with guacamole and top with tomato slices.

## Thai Burgers

I thought these were outstanding burgers but I'm biased. The real test was what others thought. Those of our crew who heard there were peanuts in the burgers were not excited. Those who tried them anyway, loved them. (Don't let the peanuts throw you; they add flavor and crunch that works wonderfully well.)

You can buy the Thai Sweet Chili Sauce from our site or at the store.

To make my Thai burgers, again we started with lean ground beef and again added an egg to help hold things together.

### Ingredients

2 pounds lean ground beef  
1 large egg, whisked with a fork  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/4 teaspoon pepper  
1/2 cup very coarsely chopped peanuts  
1/2 cup chopped green onions  
1/2 cup Thai Sweet Chili Sauce

### Directions

Gently toss these ingredients together until mixed. Don't handle more than necessary. Form nice flat burger patties with a hamburger press. Cook them until done, turning only once.

**To assemble the burgers,** we mixed some more Thai Sweet Chili Sauce with mayonnaise and spread it on the buns. (We used 1/4 cup chili sauce to 1/2 cup mayonnaise.) We topped the patty with bean sprouts.



## Ten Favorite Toppings to Make a Burger Special

We took a virtual tour of the U.S. checking out the burger menus at better restaurants. (It was an interesting tour.) We made a list of the toppings we found and took the list back to our test kitchen. Then we started cooking burgers, a mountain of burgers. As we cooked and experimented, we morphed the listing into burgers that appealed to us and our testers. Then we narrowed it down to ten. Today, we'll share these ten best toppings.

### 1. Yuri's Famous Mushroom Burger

If you like burgers smothered in sautéed mushrooms, you'll like this. The sour cream gives it richness and a little kick. It's topped with sautéed mushrooms, provolone, and sour cream on a whole wheat bun



### 2. Apollo Burger

We can't find much that is Grecian about this burger; it must have been named for the gods. This burger is topped with provolone cheese, lettuce, tomato, cucumber slices, and avocado



### 3. Acapulco Burger

The salsa and fresh avocado make this a south-of-the-border delight. It's topped with bacon, Monterey jack cheese, and of course--avocado and salsa.



#### 4. Good Earth Burger

Any burger with sprouts reminds us of the Good Earth Restaurant in Minnesota that we enjoyed so much. This burger is topped with cheddar cheese, sprouts, tomato, and avocado on a whole wheat bun.



#### 5. Carrie's California Burger

Carrie is our production manager. She's really from Houston but this is her kind of burger with a touch of the southwest. It's topped with Monterey jack cheese, slices of banana peppers, and bacon. The bun is spread with ranch dressing.



#### 6. Petra's Pesto Burger

We experimented with pesto on a burger. This one was excellent with mozzarella cheese and our own basil pesto.



#### 7. Honolulu Hula Burger

Ah, with freshly grilled pineapple, this reminded us of our time in the Islands. We splashed the burgers with our own Teriyaki Madness sauce (but you can use something else from the store) and topped it with grilled pineapple, cheddar cheese, lettuce, tomatoes and mayonnaise. The grilled pineapple balanced the kick from the teriyaki nicely.



### 8. Day Break Burger

This burger is dedicated to those who could eat a burger for breakfast. A fried egg atop a burger—that sounds like a breakfast food. In addition to the fried egg, this burger is topped with Colby cheese, lettuce, and tomatoes.



### 9. Em's Pizza Burger

We have two Emilys: one in production and one in fulfillment. It seemed like we should dedicate a burger to them. And who wouldn't like a pizza burger topped with pepperoni, mozzarella cheese, slices of tomatoes, red onions, lettuce, and basil-olive mayonnaise. We made the basil-olive mayonnaise with a half cup of mayo, a quarter cup of diced black olives, and a half tablespoon of dried basil. This sauce was a great discovery.



### 10. Red Red Onion Burger

We went back to the caramelized onions that we like so much for this one. And yes, when you caramelized red onions, they're still red. We used this recipe for caramelized onions but used red onions and apple cider vinegar instead of the white wine vinegar.

Along with the caramelized red onions, add mozzarella cheese, lettuce, and mayonnaise to your burger.



## How to Make a Chutney Burger

When Debbie Frantzen, our webmaster extraordinaire, tried our chutney her comment was, "Barbecue sauce without the spices." Actually, that was sweet chutney. Sweet chutneys are mild and may remind you of a relish like pickle or cranberry relish while hot chutneys range from spicy to just plain hot.

Chutneys are fruit-based. Mango chutney is very popular but they can be made with almost any fruit.

Chutneys are a condiment, a wonderful accompaniment to meat dishes. They can also be mixed with sour cream or cream cheese to make a cracker spread or fruit dip.

You can find chutney in some grocery stores. We carry three chutneys, plum chutney, sweet mango chutney, and hot mango chutney. Or you can make your own.

With all the possibilities, chutneys open a whole new world of burgers. Spread chutney on a burger just as you would barbecue sauce or a pickle relish. Mango chutney is a natural complement to burgers but don't overlook other chutneys.



### Gourmet Chutneys:

[Scandinavian Plum Chutney >>](#)

[Sweet Mango Chutney >>](#)

[Hot Mango Chutney >>](#)

### Chutney Recipes:

## Mango Chutney Recipe

### Ingredients

2 large mangos  
1/4 cup golden raisins  
1/2 cup brown sugar  
1 teaspoon fresh ginger  
1/4 cup apple cider vinegar  
1/8 teaspoon ground cloves  
1/2 clove of garlic  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
2 to 3 tablespoons chopped onions  
1/2 teaspoon chopped jalapeño pepper or to taste

### Directions

Peel mango and cube. Place all the ingredients in a non-reactive saucepan and simmer until the chutney reaches the desired consistency.

## Sweet Apricot Chutney

### Ingredients

1 cup dried apricots  
1 cup brown sugar  
1/2 cup raisins  
1/3 cup red or white wine vinegar  
1/2 cup water  
1/2 teaspoon salt  
1/4 teaspoon ground coriander  
1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg  
1/4 teaspoon cinnamon

### Directions

Soak the apricots in hot water for 15 minutes. Drain them and put them in a non-reactive saucepan. Add the remaining ingredients. Simmer on a low heat until the chutney has reached desired consistency.

## Sweet Apple Raspberry Chutney

### Ingredients

1/4 cup raspberry balsamic vinegar  
1/2 cup brown sugar  
1/2 of a red bell pepper, diced  
1/2 of a small, sweet onion, diced  
1 large tart apple, diced  
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

### Directions

Bring vinegar and brown sugar to a boil and then reduce the heat. Add the pepper and onion and continue to simmer for 3 to 4 minutes. Add apple and cinnamon and cook until it is tender. Continue cooking to reach the desired consistency.

## Country Pork and Asiago Cheeseburger

This burger is not for the faint of heart but for those once-in-a-great-while splurges, it is excellent. It's a meat lover's burger made with a mixture of ground pork, country sausage, and bacon. If you would like to tone it down a bit, use lean ground beef instead of the pork. If asiago cheese doesn't suit your taste, use mozzarella.

This recipe makes six quarter-pound plus burgers.

### Ingredients



one large sweet onion, sliced  
1 tablespoon butter  
1 pound ground pork  
1/2 pound country sausage  
8 strips bacon, chopped  
1/4 cup parsley, chopped  
1/2 teaspoon dried thyme  
salt and pepper  
Asiago cheese  
6 hamburger or sandwich buns

**Directions**

Cook the onion slices in butter until tender. Set aside.

While the onions are cooking, mix the ground pork, sausage, chopped bacon, parsley, and thyme together in a large bowl. Form patties by hand or with a [hamburger press](#).

Cook the patties and top with cheese. Place the cooked patties on a prepared bun, top with onions, and serve.

## Swiss Mushroom Burgers with Sweet and Sour Onions

Swiss mushroom burgers are good. Sweet and sour onions make them fantastic.

"I could binge on these burgers!"—Debbie

There is nothing difficult about these burgers. Make burger patties, cook them over a grill or in a skillet, and top them with Swiss cheese for the last few minutes so that the cheese melts. While the burgers are cooking, sauté sliced mushrooms.

Place the burgers on buns, top with sautéed mushrooms, and then with sweet and sour onions. (*Recipe follows.*)

### Sweet and Sour Onions

#### Ingredients

2 large onions cut into slices and then cut into 1/2-inch pieces  
4 tablespoons butter  
1/4 cup low-sodium soy sauce  
1/3 cup apricot jam  
2 tablespoons granulated sugar  
2 tablespoons white wine vinegar  
1/3 cup water  
1/2 teaspoon garlic powder  
1/2 teaspoon ground ginger  
1/8 teaspoon salt  
dash of pepper

#### Directions

In a skillet, sauté the sliced onions in the butter until translucent. Add the soy sauce, jam, sugar, vinegar, and water. Add the garlic powder and ground ginger. Simmer the mixture until the onions and the water have nearly evaporated and the onions are in a caramelized sauce. Stir in the salt and pepper, adding more to taste. Set aside.



## Burger Buns

### Building Better Burgers

Build a better burger with a better bun. It's amazing how much difference a really good bun can make. Instead of the bun being merely a carrier for the meat and condiments, a really good bun will be as much of a treat as the contents. The burger and the bun should complement each other perfectly.



We discovered how good a hamburger bun can be years ago. After all this experience and experimentation, we discovered that a Honey Wheat Bread mix makes a great hamburger bun. And as busy as we are—especially at this time of year—the best part of these buns may be their convenience: Mix, let rise, form into shapes, and bake. The mix goes together quickly (just add water and butter) and you can be doing other things during the rising and the baking.

These also make great sandwich rolls. Try them with your favorite deli meat.

We suggest having several of these mixes on hand to make buns or to make homemade bread. Either will be a special treat for your family. See how to make these superb hamburgers or sandwich buns from a Honey Wheat Bread Burger Bun Mix by [clicking here](#).

## Making Great Hamburger (or Sandwich) Buns

We've said it before, "Buns make the burger" and nothing makes a better burger than homemade buns. In fact, once you've had a burger on a fresh homemade bun, burgers will never be the same.

You can use your favorite bread mix (or bread recipe) to make some terrific hamburger or sandwich buns. A single-loaf mix will make eight or ten buns. We have mixes especially designed for making rolls and buns.



Mix the dough according to the package or recipe directions and then remove the dough to a greased bowl and cover it with plastic. Let it rise until it is doubled and very puffy--an hour or more.

Grease two large baking sheets (for a two loaf mix) or cover them with parchment paper. Once the dough has risen, deflate it and divide the dough into eighteen equal pieces with a sharp knife (or scale the pieces at 3 ounces each on your kitchen scales). Form smooth round balls by pulling the dough around the center and pinching the seams together on the bottom of the roll. Place them on the greased sheet allowing room for them to expand. (You can place a dozen of them on a 12-inch by 18-inch baking sheet---three rows of four buns each.)

On the baking sheet, gently press the balls into flat discs with your hand. The dough will tend to spring back. Allow the dough to relax a few minutes and then press again. You may need to repeat the process again until you have discs that are 3 1/2 to 4 inches in diameter and 1/2 to 3/4-inches thick.

Lightly dust the tops with flour (we use a screen or strainer to distribute the flour). Cover the rolls lightly with plastic and allow them to rise again until doubled and puffy--about an hour. Let them rise completely for soft, light buns.

Preheat the oven to 375 degrees. Bake the rolls for 15 minutes or until the tops are a rich golden brown. If you are baking both sheets at once, switch the top sheet with the bottom sheet half way through the baking so that the buns will bake evenly. Immediately remove the rolls to a wire rack to cool.

## Making Hamburger Buns on the Grill

If you want to impress the neighbors, make your own hamburger buns. If you want to impress your neighbors and your mother-in-law, make hamburger buns on the grill. It does take some time and some attention, but it's not as hard as you might think.



There are some compelling reasons to bake your own buns on the grill. They're better. A good burger on a freshly baked homemade bun is out of this world. Plus it's fun to watch the neighbors turn their noses upwind when the smell of fresh baked bread wafts over the fence. And in the summertime, you don't have to heat up the kitchen to bake.

You can bake nearly anything with a covered grill. (If your grill doesn't have a cover, improvise with a large inverted pot.) The heat rises and circulates in the covered area just as it does in your oven. The heat source can be charcoal, gas, or even wood. We prefer gas because it is easier to control and does not impart a smoked taste to the bread.

The challenge to baking bread on the grill is manipulating the heat. Your grill will tend to be hotter than the oven and hottest near the flames. In our grill, there is an elevated shelf for baking potatoes and corn that is perfect for baking bread. If your grill doesn't have an elevated shelf, set an old pot on the grill to make an elevated platform. But just so you know how hot the temperature is, borrow the kitchen thermometer and set it on the shelf. You should be able to adjust the heat until the thermometer is reading 350 to 375 degrees. After a few batches you'll have it perfect and we bet that the first batch off the grill will be just fine.

You can use a bread mix, a roll mix, or your favorite recipe. (Roll mixes are usually richer and slightly sweeter than bread mixes.) Mix according to package or recipe directions. (You can use your bread machine on the dough setting.) After the dough has risen, form the dough into balls as you would for dinner rolls stretching the dough around the ball and tucking it into the bottom. A 2 1/2 inch ball is about right, four ounces on your kitchen scale. Place the balls on a greased baking sheet. (The dusting that you can see on the pan in the picture is cornmeal.) Use your knuckles to press the balls flat for hamburger buns.



(The dough may tend to spring back and you may have to press the buns two or three times.) Cover the buns with plastic wrap and move them back to the kitchen to rise until doubled and light.

If you like, just before baking, brush the buns with an egg white wash (one egg white plus one tablespoon of water) and then sprinkle them with sesame seeds.

Bake the buns just as you would in the kitchen oven. If you have your temperature down to range, it should take 15 to 20 minutes. An occasional peek to see how your bread is doing as it nears completion is okay.

You should have great hamburger buns but here are a few more hints to help you along the way:

- Bake the buns before the burgers. The bread can cool while you cook the rest of the burgers and burning grease from the burgers in the bottom of the grill makes the temperature harder to control and the soot can stain the bread.
- Grills tend to not circulate the hot air as well as ovens. To keep the bottom of the bread from burning, consider double pans—one baking sheet placed on top of the other. The second pan will tend to insulate the bottom of the bread to keep it from burning.
- If your bread is baking faster on one side than the other, turn the pan 180 degrees part way through the baking time.
- The tendency is to burn the bottom of the bread. Place the bread as far away from the flames as you can even if it means elevating the bread.

There you have it—better buns than you can buy. You'll be the envy of the neighborhood and earn a little respect from your mother-in-law.

## Potato Chips & Fries

### The Quest for the Perfect Potato Chips

When I was a college-age lad, I worked a stint in a potato chip factory. There I made a discovery: fresh, warm potato chips were much better and very different than those from a bag. Store-bought potato chips were never the same. So we headed to our test kitchen where our quest was to make chips as outstanding as those in my memory. Along the way, we diverted and made terrific fries.



We knew that we could make great homemade potato chips in the deep fryer; we wanted to know if we could make equally good potato chips in the oven. So we started with the oven potato chips. We cut russets into thin slices, about an eighth inch thick and then soaked them in cold water. We spread aluminum foil on a baking sheet and greased the foil well. After the slices had soaked for twenty minutes, we spread the potato slices across the foil, brushed them with vegetable oil, and baked them at 425 until they were just starting to turn golden. We put them on racks to cool and sprinkled them with salt.

These chips were good but not as crispy as they should be. Back to the drawing board. We thought maybe a slower bake would draw more moisture from them and make them crispy. We lowered the temperature again and again. The best chips came at 325 degrees, slow baking for 20 minutes.

We then turned to deep fried potato chips.

We heated the oil in our deep fryer to 360 degrees. We fried them in small quantities until they started to turn a golden color, drained them on paper towels and then moved them to a rack to cool completely. Sprinkled with a little salt, they were delightful—much better than potato chips out of a bag.

And yes, the fried potato chips were much better than the baked chips.

Here's what you do:

Pick good quality russet potatoes. Wash them and cut out any bad spots.

Cut them into 1/8-inch thick slices. You can do so with a knife; it's a lot easier to get uniform slices that will cook uniformly with a mandolin or with the attachment to your mixer.

Heat the oil to 350 to 375 degrees. You can do so, on the stovetop or with a thermostatically controlled deep fryer. If you are frying on the stovetop, use a deep pan and a candy thermometer, and watch your work. **If your oil becomes too hot, it can burst into flames.**

Cook a small amount of potato chips at a time. If you cook too many, the potatoes will drop the temperature of the oil too far. Oil that is not hot enough will make your potato chips soggy.

Cook the potato chips until they are a light, golden color and begin to float.

Remove the chips to a paper towel to absorb grease. Sprinkle with salt and your favorite seasoning.

## The Sweet Potato Chip Effort

We had tons of trouble making really great sweet potato chips. So we turned to our subscribers for help. Diane Tietjens came to the rescue.

“These are one of my favorites,” she reported. “Slice the sweet potatoes with a potato peeler rather than a knife.”

It seems that the secret of crisp sweet potato chips is to slice the potatoes very thin. An adjustable mandoline works well.

We cooked them in oil at 350 degrees for four or five minutes. They were just starting to brown and were rising to the top. We drained them on paper towels and sprinkled them with a little salt.

No wonder these are one of Diane’s favorites.



## How to Make French Fries

French fries are easy to make at home and they taste better than most of those from the restaurants. We like to make them outside on the deck—away from the heat and any odor. Here’s how:

1. Pick good quality russet potatoes. Wash them and cut out any bad spots.
2. Cut them into 3/4-inch wide strips. You can do so with a knife; it’s a lot easier to do with a French fry maker.
3. Heat the oil to 350 to 375 degrees. You can do so, on the stovetop or with a thermostatically controlled deep fryer. If you are frying on the stovetop, use a deep pan, a candy thermometer, and watch your work. **If your oil becomes too hot, it can burst into flames.**



4. Cook a small amount of fries at a time. If you cook too many, the potatoes will drop the temperature of the oil too far. Oil that is not warm enough will make your fries soggy.
5. Cook the fries until they are a rich, golden color and begin to float.
6. Remove the fries to a paper towel to absorb grease. Sprinkle with salt and maybe your favorite seasoning. Serve immediately.

## The Prepared Pantry Oven Fries

These are very good oven fries, the best that we have made.

2 1/2 pounds russet or other baking potatoes (not peeled)  
1/2 tablespoon vegetable oil  
2 teaspoons granulated sugar  
1 teaspoon salt  
pepper

Preheat oven to 425 degrees.

1. Line a baking sheet with foil or use a crisper and spray the crisper. If using a baking sheet, spray the foil well with a mister. (Because of the sugar, these fries will stick. Grease well.)
2. Cut the potatoes into 1/2 inch thick fries.
3. In a large mixing bowl, mix together the oil, sugar, salt, and pepper. Toss the potatoes in the mixture. Spread on the baking sheet or crisper in one layer.
4. Bake for 40 minutes or until the potatoes are tender and browned. Serve immediately.



## Cheesy Oven Fries and Other Variations on the Potato

It's easy to make cheesy oven fries and other variations of fries and potato chips—simply take the basic recipe and add cheese, spices, or powdered flavors to your chips and fries. We'll give you the basic recipe and make some suggestions to get you started.

- **Cheesy oven fries.** Sprinkle grated cheddar on the fries just as they come from the oven. A little paprika or pepper will provide some extra flavor.
- **Cheesy home fries.** Sprinkle the grated cheddar on your home fries while they are steaming hot and just placed on the serving platter. (If you stir the cheese into the potatoes, the moisture from



- the cheese will soften the crispy character of home fries.)
- **Rosemary fries or chips.** Sprinkle on crushed rosemary.
  - **Thyme fries or chips.** Sprinkle on crushed thyme.
  - **Italian fries or chips.** Sprinkle on an [Italian seasoning blend](#).
  - **Taco fries or chips.** Sprinkle on a [Mexican seasoning blend](#).
  - **Sour cream dill fries or chips.** Dust your fries or chips with [sour cream powder](#) and sprinkle with dill weed.

## Diner Style Home Fries

It is possible to make home style fries just like your neighborhood diner. Here's how.

2 1/2 pounds red potatoes, washed and 3/4-inch diced  
1/2 cup butter  
1 large onion, diced  
salt and pepper to taste  
1/2 teaspoon garlic salt

1. Place the potatoes and one tablespoon of the butter in a microwave safe bowl. Cover with plastic and cook for three to five minutes or until cooked but still firm. Shake the potatoes in the bowl with plastic on them to distribute the butter.
2. While the potatoes are cooking, cook the onion in the skillet in one tablespoon butter until the onion pieces are tender and cooked. Remove to a bowl and set aside.
3. Melt the remaining butter in the skillet over medium high heat. Distribute the potatoes (but not the onion) in the skillet. Add salt and pepper. Pack down with a spatula and let cook until crispy on one side, about five minutes. Turn the potatoes, turn down the heat, and repeat until the potatoes are crispy throughout. Add the garlic salt. Add more salt and pepper to taste if necessary. Stir in the onions and serve.



*Baker's note: We use a heavy, nonstick skillet. A well-seasoned cast iron skillet should work equally well.*

## Principles for Making Home Fries

Home fries, potatoes that are fried crispy in the pan, are a delicious and classic breakfast food. And since you can add almost whatever you want to them, they can be a great way to experiment with your food and still come up with something delicious. However, if you aren't careful, the crispy, flavorful dish can turn out a sloppy, bland mess. Here are some basic rules to follow to make delicious home fried potatoes.



1. Don't use high-starch potatoes like russets. Russets make nice fluffy baked potatoes but they soak up grease in the frying pan and come apart readily. Red potatoes or Yukon potatoes work better.
2. Partially cook but don't overcook the potatoes. They should be nearly done but still firm.
3. Cut your potatoes to the right size. About 3/4 inch cubes are right. They need to be close to uniform for even cooking.
4. Spread the potatoes, pack them down, and let them cook. It's the prolonged contact with the hot skillet that makes the potatoes crispy. You want as much contact with the skillet as possible and long enough contact to make a crust. Don't turn them too often.
5. The secret of making them crispy is in the heat. Make sure the pan is hot (but don't scorch the butter) when you put the potatoes in. Don't turn the potatoes until they are crispy on one side. Then turn the heat down and only turn occasionally.
6. Cook the onions (if desired) separately and add them last. The moisture in the onions is absorbed by the crust on the potatoes, making them lose their crispy character.

If you're feeling creative, add peppers, ham, sausage, cheese, or anything else that sounds good. Just be sure to cook the additions separate from the potatoes and stir them in after the potatoes are cooked.

## Safety

### Cooking Outdoors and Keeping Food Safe

Nothing will spoil a tail gating party quicker than food poisoning and yet there are millions of cases each year in the U.S. Most cases are mild—not much more than an inconvenience—but some are serious and occasionally fatal.

You can protect your food, your families, and your friends by following a few safety precautions.

If you are in charge of preparing food, you should know the enemy, the three types of microorganisms that might make you sick.

They are yeasts, molds, and bacteria. You are surrounded by all three--they are in the air, the soil, the water. You cannot avoid them entirely but you can control their growth.



**Yeasts can be either friend or foe** but they are not the problem that molds and bacteria are. Molds are microscopic fungi that float through the air, land on your food (a good reason to keep food covered), and start to grow when conditions are right. The silken threads of these fungi can cause streaks of discoloration in the food or cover it with a mat of fuzz.

**Mold can make you sick even when there is no visible presence.** The mold may be dispersed in the food, invisible, but still concentrated enough to harm you. Molds can leave behind harmful microtoxins that lower the acidity of some foods allowing bacteria to thrive. Then it is the bacteria that will make you sick, not the mold.

We fight molds in two ways—avoiding contamination as much as possible and controlling temperatures. Molds don't grow below 32 degrees and they die above 140 degrees.

**Bacteria are the big, bad bullies on the block** and are far tougher than molds and yeasts. The three bacteria strains that typically cause food poisoning are salmonella, staphylococcus, and botulism. All require a moist environment to grow and temperatures between 50 degrees and 140 degrees. At the right temperature, with enough moisture, and the right pH, bacteria can grow at a staggering rate. Under these conditions, foods that are even minimally contaminated can become dangerously loaded with bacteria in just a few hours.

Because bacteria generally won't grow in dry conditions, dry foods are usually safe. Moist foods, particularly meats and dairy products, carry bacteria—especially staphylococcus—and need to be used with care.

Botulism is the most toxic bacteria--the poison thrown off by botulism is so powerful that a single teaspoon of toxin could kill thousands of people.

But the good news is that bacteria can be contained with temperatures. Bacteria are inactive or

nearly so at temperatures below 40 degrees. Temperatures above 145 degrees begin to kill bacteria. So keep cold foods below 40 degrees and hot foods above 145.

(A common myth is that we can make contaminated food safe by heating it. Not so—at least not so without extended boiling or a pressure cooker. You can kill the bacteria at high temperatures but the toxins they leave behind can be dangerous. Never attempt to sanitize unsafe food by reheating it.)

Know the enemy and follow these three rules and you will avoid most ugly encounters with food poisoning:

1. **Clean and sanitize work surfaces often.** Recognize that there is a difference between clean and sanitized. Use a bleach solution or a cleaner with bleach to sanitize surfaces. We use Clorox Clean-up . . . a lot. (Be careful to keep cleaners such as this away from clothes—they do bleach.)
2. **Avoid contamination**—especially from such sources as raw chicken juices and unclean meat thermometers (two likely culprits). Wash and disinfect your hands often.
3. **Keep hot foods hot and cold foods cold.** Remember that the enemy thrives in temperatures between 40 and 140 degrees. Use a thermometer to ensure that foods are held at the right temperatures. If tailgating, keep a thermometer in your ice chest to assure that meats are at the right temperature. Since microorganisms are multiplying in this temperature range, minimize the time that food is held in this range.

We hope you have a wonderful, safe weekend on the patio or in the park without mishap. Following these rules will help.

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