

Bacon, Chive, and Cheese Potato Bread

1 1/2 pounds russet potatoes, scrubbed and cut into quarters

4 teaspoons salt

1/2 cup tepid reserved potato water (80°-90° F)

3 tablespoons active dry yeast

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

4 1/2 cups unbleached all-purpose flour

1/2 cup chopped chives

8 slices of bacon, cooked and crumbled

1 cup cheddar cheese, cubed

Cooking the Potatoes: Place potatoes into a 2-quart pot, cover them with water, add 2 teaspoons of the salt, and boil until the potatoes are soft enough to be easily pierced by the point of a knife. Use a measuring cup to draw 1/2 cup of the potato water out of the pot; reserve. Drain the potatoes in a colander and then spread them out, either in the colander or on a cooling rack over a jelly-roll pan, and let them cool and air-dry for 20-30 minutes.

Mixing the Dough: Once the potatoes are cool, stir the yeast into the reserved potato water (if the water is no longer warm, heat it for a few seconds until it is warm to the touch) and allow it to sit for 5 minutes; it will turn creamy.

Meanwhile, turn the cooled potatoes into the bowl of a mixer fitted with the paddle attachment and mash them. With the mixer on low speed, add the dissolved yeast and the olive and mix until the liquids are incorporated into the potatoes.

Replace the paddle with the dough hook and, still mixing on low speed, add the flour and the remaining 2 teaspoons salt. Mix on low speed for 2-3 minutes, then increase the speed to medium and mix for 11 minutes more. In the last 3 minutes of kneading, add the bacon and chives. The dough will be firm at first and soft at the finish. At the start, it will look dry, but as it's worked it will be transformed.

First Rise: Cover the mixing bowl with plastic wrap and place in the refrigerator, allowing the dough to rise over night.

The next morning, position a rack in the bottom of the oven and fit it with a baking stone, leaving a border of at least 1 inch all around. Preheat the oven to 400° F. Place a linen towel on a baking sheet, rub the towel with flour, and set aside. Rub a baker's peel or baking sheet with cornmeal or flour, or line with parchment paper. Fill a spray bottle with water; set aside.

Shaping the Dough: Turn the bread out onto a lightly floured surface and gently knead in the cubed cheese. Using a dough scraper, cut the dough in half. To shape each half into a torpedo shape, first shape it into a ball and then flatten it into a disk. Starting at the end farthest from you, roll up the dough toward you. When you're on your last roll, stop and pull the free end of dough

toward you, stretching it gently, and dust it with flour. Finish the roll and, if necessary, rock the loaf back and forth a little to taper the ends and form a torpedo.

Second Rise: Place the loaves on the floured towel, seam side down, and cover them with the ends of the towel (or another towel). Let the loaves rise at room temperature for 30-40 minutes.

Baking the Bread: When you're ready to bake, spray the oven walls with water and immediately close the oven door to trap the steam. Turn the breads out, seam side up, onto the peel or baking sheet and transfer them to the oven. Reduce the oven temperature to 375° degrees and spray with water again, bake the loaves for 45-50 minutes, or until the crust is very brown, and the interior temperature measures 200° F when an instant-read thermometer is plunged into the center of the loaves. Remove the loaves from the oven and cool on a rack for at least 20 minutes before slicing.

Adapted from Leslie Mackie's *Rustic Potato Loaves* recipe in *Baking with Julia*

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