

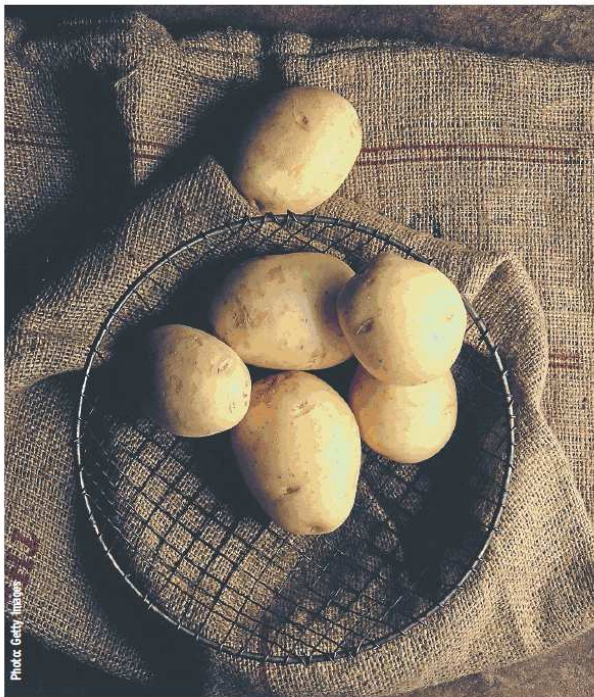
 Seasonal cook


Photo: Getty Images

Hot potato

There's a spud for every dish and every season,
writes STEVE MANFREDI.

Choosing potatoes for a salad or a curry is easy, with so many varieties for general use at our disposal. On the other hand, sourcing consistently appropriate potatoes for more demanding dishes, such as chips or gnocchi, can be problematic.

A convenient way to classify potatoes is by placing them in one of two groups: floury or waxy. Floury potatoes have a lower moisture and sugar content but are high in starch, making them ideal for baking, mashing and frying. Varieties include spunta, kennebec, sebago, toolangi delight and coliban. These are suitable for gnocchi and chips.

Waxy potatoes are lower in starch and

contain more water. They can be almost as sugar-laden as sweet potatoes. Firm-fleshed, they hold together well, making them ideal for boiling and prolonged cooking in dishes such as casseroles and curries. This group includes pink eye, desiree, kipfler, royal blue, binjet and pink fir apple.

While variety is important, so too is where the potato is grown. You might make great gnocchi one week with perfectly dry sebagos grown in one part of the country, while the next batch, grown somewhere else, could be frustratingly waterlogged.

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POTATO, BEAN AND LAMB STEW

300g yellow-fleshed potatoes such as desiree or pink eye

- 1 onion, peeled
- 1 medium leek, trimmed and washed
- ½ a celery heart, washed
- 2 cloves garlic, peeled
- 1 tbsp fresh rosemary leaves
- 125ml extra virgin olive oil
- 300g shelled borlotti beans, fresh or dried
- 400g roast lamb shoulder or leftover lamb roast
- 1 tbsp chopped parsley
- Salt and pepper

Peel potatoes and chop into 2-3cm pieces. Place in a container of cold water until needed. Roughly chop onion, leek and celery to fit into a food processor along with garlic and rosemary. Pulse until vegetables are finely chopped, ensuring they aren't processed to a liquid. Heat half the olive oil in a large, heavy-bottomed soup pot and add chopped vegetables. Keep stirring on moderate heat until vegetables have softened, about 2-3 minutes. Add drained potatoes, along with beans, and keep stirring and frying in the pot for a few more minutes. Add cold water to cover vegetables by about 3cm, stir and bring to the boil. Turn down immediately to a very low simmer and keep cooking gently for 3 hours. Stir every so often to make sure it's not catching and add a little water if too dry. Cut lamb into bite-sized pieces and stir in. Simmer for another 30 minutes. Stir in parsley, season with salt and pepper and serve in bowls. Finish with remaining olive oil.

Serves 6 as a hearty winter stew
Wine Shiraz.

POTATOES WITH ONIONS AND PANCETTA

- 1kg waxy potatoes
- 2 tsp extra virgin olive oil
- 1 large onion, peeled and finely sliced
- 2 tsp pancetta, finely sliced
- 1 tsp chopped fresh thyme
- Salt and pepper

Simmer potatoes in their jackets in salted water for about 30 minutes until tender. Drain and cook a little. Peel and slice thinly. Heat olive oil in a wide pan and fry onion and pancetta until golden. Add potatoes and fry until coloured. Squash potato roughly with a fork, add thyme and fry on moderately high heat, constantly scraping and stirring so they don't catch and burn. This should take about 10 minutes. There should be a mixture of soft potatoes with crispy bits. Season and serve as a side dish with scallops, roasts or braises.

Serves 6 as a side dish
Wine Verdicchio if serving with scallops.

 Full bottle

QUAFFING

DE BORTOLI WINDY PEAK HEATHCOTE SHIRAZ 2010, \$14

De Bortoli Windy Peak range has great-value, well-made and uncomplicated wines. They are not wines to sip slowly, but neither are they simple.

Instead, they should be cracked open and enjoyed with friends. The 2010 Heathcote shiraz is perfect with braised beef cheeks.

There's so much to like here, from its super-bright, ripe plum and blueberry fruit notes to bay leaf, savoury characters and hint of spice. It has crisp, tangy acidity and ripe tannins.



TRYING

HELEN'S HILL CHARDONNAY 2010, \$30

Based in the Yarra Valley, Helen's Hill produces several chardonnays. This one's really pleasing and complex, with its core of citrus fruit – think grapefruit with a touch of lemon, figs and stone fruit – tempered by its savoury drive. It's meaty and nutty with a hint of spice, mainly derived from the oak that's neatly integrated. Plenty of tangy acidity adds brightness. A complex wine. It's not overworked, and boasts plenty of mid-palate texture. A lovely match to grilled scallops.



CELLARING

PEPPER TREE COOJUN HUNTER VALLEY SHIRAZ 2010, \$55

The fruit for Pepper Tree's Coojun shiraz comes from vines planted in 1920. The result is a wine of depth and complexity. This also has all the youthful charm of a classic Hunter shiraz, with its super-bright fruit, earthy, spicy nuances and the oak neatly integrated. It stands out for being medium-bodied and lively, yet it has incredibly fine tannins. Don't be fooled by the ease with which this wine goes down – it'll also age for another 10 years. A perfect match to a tomato-based meaty ragu.
Jane Faulkner

