

The PACKARD PRESS

A collection of thoughts and stories to educate, entertain, and inspire.

Breaking Bread and Sharing Spuds

A Love Letter to the World's Most Versatile Food

Samwise Gamgee in "The Lord of the Rings" was right. You can really do just about anything with a potato. It's by far and away one of the most versatile foods there is, and it's my very favorite.

April was National Food Month, and I've always seen food as a special way to bond. Conversations and experiences happen at the table over food you just won't have anywhere else. "Breaking bread with someone" means to foster trust and friendship, and it's no surprise, considering how much food connects us.

In my family, we always try to eat at least one meal together, and we use food as a big part of our celebrations. When someone has a special day, like getting a good grade or accomplishing a goal, we have a red-letter day. That person gets a special red plate and shiny fork with one of their favorite foods. My son recently turned 8, and he got crepes and Lucky Charms on his red plate. If it were me, though, my plate would need some spuds.

Lately, my kids have been playing around with Would-You-Rather-style questions. And recently, we asked each other, if you could only eat one type of food forever, what would it be? My answer was adamantly the potato.

You can prepare this tuber in so many ways. Baked, twice baked, mashed, smashed, boiled, fried, stewed, or even a potato salad; I think the only way you can't make them is as a dessert. They're straight carbs, but they provide a good energy boost and are nutrient-dense. They're incredibly practical and delicious, making a perfect side dish or even main entree.

In our household, some of our favorite ways to enjoy this powerhouse food are mashed with butter and garlic, or roasted in the oven with salt and rosemary, where they come out like mini baked potatoes that are seasoned just right. I also like to make everyone breakfast potatoes with sausage,

eggs, and some melted cheese on top. Even in a hearty stew (where the meat is usually the star), I am after those veggies. For a long time, I would judge a restaurant by how it cooked its potatoes. If the fries were good, then that's a good restaurant.

The potato is far more interesting than you may think when you pass by the standard russets in the store. It's a vegetable that changed the world. They originated in the Peruvian highlands between 8,000 and 5,000 years BC and fueled the Incan Empire. I lived in Peru for a while, and while I was there, I got to taste a wide variety of potatoes in every color you can imagine.

They didn't spread to the rest of Europe until the Columbian Exchange in 1536. The plant became such a reliable staple food that it reduced famine in several countries. Of course, extreme reliance on potatoes led to the Irish potato famine when mold destroyed the crops. Potatoes have even been featured in works by great artists, such as Vincent van Gogh's 1885 painting "The Potato Eaters," one of his earliest works depicting a group of people eating potatoes.

When my family answered the question of what one food they would eat forever, wheat and chicken came up, and one of my kids said waffles. Those foods are all great; chicken comes in second place for me. But my answer remains the same. Nothing beats the potato.

When it comes down to it, no matter whether it's pancakes, crepes, potatoes, or a special red-letter day meal, what matters most is spending time together with your loved ones over food. We might not be able to eat every meal together, but the ones we share lead to lasting memories, connections, and second helpings of spuds.

-Michael Packard





Cheese, Conflict, and Crunch

THE MILITARY'S CONNECTION TO CHEETOS

Did you know that snacking on Cheetos is a pastime rooted in American patriotism?

The link between the orange dust on your fingers and the preservation of our nation's freedom began during World War I. Always looking for ways to feed soldiers during the global conflict, the U.S. military purchased *25 million* quarter-pound tins of processed cheese from the National Dairy Products Corporation (now known as Kraft). The military's use of cheese as more than a snack developed during World War II, with the dairy product being added to soldiers' meals, including potatoes, pasta, and vegetables. By 1944, cheese sauces and spreads had become a standard part of wartime diets. In that year alone, *100 million pounds* of cheese were purchased for service members.

That said, there was just one problem: Due to its fat content, cheese cannot be dehydrated. This dilemma led to it occupying a larger portion of soldiers' rations than other foods that could be dried to reduce their size and weight. However, U.S. Department of Agriculture scientist George Sanders remedied that issue toward the end of World War II, thanks to his invention of cheese powder. Finally, military masses could enjoy cheese while keeping rationing more economical.

After the war ended, food manufacturers happily utilized the military's surplus of powdered cheese. In 1948, the Frito Company added powdered cheese to its cornmeal sticks, creating what eventually became Cheetos.

So, the next time you look at your orange-stained fingers after munching on this beloved snack, thank the U.S. military for turning its love for cheese into an American institution.

YOUR PHONE ISN'T THE ONLY PROBLEM

Distracted Driving Is More Than Texting

When most people think about distracted driving, they picture someone texting behind the wheel, but that's only one part of the story. April is Distracted Driving Awareness Month, and that covers anything that pulls your eyes, hands, or attention away from the road, even for a few seconds. In Texas, texting while driving is illegal, and in San Antonio, the use of handheld mobile devices is completely prohibited unless your vehicle is at a complete stop. Any time your focus is not on driving, you and others are at risk.

Manual Distractions

Any activity that causes a driver to remove one or both hands from the wheel can make it difficult to control a vehicle. Manual distractions include eating while driving, adjusting controls, or performing personal grooming tasks such as applying makeup.

Visual Distractions

It only takes seconds for an accident to occur if your attention is on anything but the road. When you're distracted visually, you can miss important road signs, traffic cues, and other vehicles around you. Though GPS is helpful and typically allowed, you need to set it up before driving so it doesn't distract you while you're driving. Turning to talk to your passengers or to look out the window can also impair your focus.



Cognitive Distractions

If your mind is somewhere else, it can be as dangerous as physical distractions, like your phone. Cognitive distractions are any states of mind where you're not processing the road around you. It could mean you're daydreaming or thinking about the stresses of the day, slowing your reaction times or causing you to miss cues on the road. When you get into a deep or emotional conversation with your passengers or on a phone call, it can affect your focus, too.

Cellphone use, including texting or looking at social media, is particularly dangerous because it involves all three types of distractions. Any time you get behind the wheel, it's essential to limit your distractions and pull over if you absolutely need to take a call or handle a distraction.

If a distracted driver has injured you or a loved one, contact us at the Packard Law Firm today.

—Michael Packard

A SKY FULL OF WONDER

Easy Tips for Family Stargazing Adventures

Growing up, we had a big pasture out in the middle of nowhere. As kids, we'd go there with blankets to just look at the stars. Sometimes, after watching for shooting stars, we'd fall asleep and wake up covered in morning dew. It was a beautiful sight. San Antonio is a big city, so we don't go out stargazing as much, but it's truly quite amazing to see a dark sky full of stars.

April 13-20 was International Dark Sky Week, celebrated during the new moon when the night skies are the darkest. No matter where you are, there are ways to enjoy the beauty of a starry night with your family, and it's well worth seeing.

Go Dark

The dark really is on your side if you want to spot stars. Depending on where you live, do your best to find a place outside the city with as little glow from surrounding lights and buildings as possible. If you can't get out into the countryside or are watching the sky from home, make sure to turn off all your lights and look away from any streetlights or



other bright spots. It can help if you're a bit elevated, on a hill, which gives you a different angle on the sky.

Grab Some Binoculars

Though you can enjoy the stars without any fancy equipment, a few tools can enhance your viewing experience. Telescopes can give you a close-up view of particular stars or planets, though they give a more narrow look at the sky. Binoculars let you see a bit more and are typically lightweight and easy to pack. You can even download some great apps on your phone that will show you the stars and constellations above you in real time.

Get Cosmically Cozy

Stargazing takes some patience, so dress warmly if it's still chilly at night. You'll be mostly standing or sitting, so it's nice to have a reclining chair that lets you look up comfortably. As with any outdoor activity, wear sturdy shoes and pack some snacks to make it even more fun. A dark sky can be inspirational, so bring along a notebook for your children to jot down what they saw.

-Michael Packard

TAKE A BREAK

R Y R D U M M G X Q S E K S U
 M E A E S L N M C M G G B H D
 U G G E T I R C S P N C U O Z
 W P Q R T S T E B F O N D W F
 D Q J N O S A X E N T H S E Q
 K N A Z W W E E S T P K E R G
 S L J E I J T E Y K N W R J E
 P K E S V C R H L W O U Q J H
 Y T G N K V U D I U U U L C M
 S G V V A X F Y L M I D F O K
 R U U T D N O M A I D H U N V
 K X I R E F U N D R P D T P V
 J O G I L F U E K I R R F R K
 N Y K V Z D B U Z F L F C P D
 I I S E X A T G E Z G A A F W

Buds	Lily	Shower
Conservation	Planting	Sweets
Diamond	Refund	Taxes
Easter	Regrowth	Volunteer

CRAB RANGOON MAC AND CHEESE

Ingredients

- 1/2 lb elbow pasta
- 8 oz Jack cheese, grated
- 8 oz cream cheese
- 1 bunch scallions, chopped
- 1/2 cup pickled jalapeños, chopped (optional)
- 2 tbsp soy sauce
- 1/4 cup milk
- 1/2 tbsp red pepper flakes
- 1/2 lb lump crab
- 12 wonton wrappers

Directions

1. Bring water to a boil for the pasta and preheat the oven to 350 F.
2. Drop pasta into boiling water.
3. In a bowl, mix all the ingredients except pasta and wonton wrappers; stir well.
4. Just before the pasta is ready, add about 1/2 cup of pasta water to the cheese mixture; stir well.
5. Strain pasta and add to cheese mixture. Stir, then place it in a baking dish or individual ramekins.
6. Bake for 25-30 minutes until bubbly and creamy.
7. While baking, cut wontons into triangles and fry batches in oil until crispy.
8. Drain wontons and season with salt.
9. Serve pasta with the crispy wonton wrappers.

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1. The Tuber That Changed the World
2. From Soldier Snack to Cheesy Sensation
When Focus Fades, Crashes Happen
3. Make the Most of a Starry Night
Crab Rangoon Mac and Cheese
4. An Entertaining Way to Get Outside

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TAKE GAME NIGHT OUTDOORS

Backyard Fun Made Easy

If your backyard could talk, it would probably say, "Use me more."

An outdoor game night is a fun way to do just that. It's easy to prep, and you don't need a huge space or a Pinterest-perfect setup. You just need a loose plan and a few games that everyone will enjoy.

Start by thinking about the people before the games. For an all-adult crowd, you might want more competitive activities. If kids are in the mix, consider options that let them run around without wiping out your flower beds. Around 2-4 games is ideal, and the best mix is a combo of active, competitive, and casual options.

Cornhole and ladder toss are great because you can explain the rules in under a minute and rotate players in and out. BucketBall and yard pong are also fun and easy to learn. Higher-energy options like Spikeball or capture the flag are perfect for a more active crowd. For something a little quieter, set up a table with a Jenga stack, cards, or a dice game that people can play while chatting.

Once you have games in mind, think about the layout. Pick a main "anchor" spot, and put your most social game there. Set up a couple of chairs nearby where people can sit and snack when

they're not playing. Keep your "quiet" table in a corner near the food and drinks, and arrange things so people can drift between areas without crossing live throwing zones.

Some simple lighting (think string lights, stake lights, and lanterns) will keep the fun going after sundown, and a Bluetooth speaker with a shared playlist keeps everything lively. Food and drinks can also stay simple. A spread of easy-to-grab finger foods and a cooler with ice, water, and a couple of drink options keep you from running in and out of the kitchen.

You can add special touches like a selfie station or prizes for the winners, but the goal is to do something different and fun without stressing about the planning. If people leave with some grass in their shoes and a good story, you did game night right.

