

Cooking Corner

Tips To Help You

California Cheesy Twice-Baked Potatoes, A Comfort Food Classic

(NAPSA)—Few foods go together as deliciously as cheese and potatoes. This recipe for California Cheesy Twice-Baked Potatoes pairs the classic comfort food combo in a homey, satisfying dish that family and friends will love.

The easy-to-prepare dish combines favorite baked potato toppings such as California Monterey Jack and Cheddar cheeses, sour cream, crumbled bacon and fresh chives with fluffy mashed potatoes that is then mounded into the hollowed-out potato shells. The stuffed potatoes are then briefly baked a second time to brown the filling and crisp the shells.

This dish is great for a casual dinner or a hearty side dish. Simply serve two potato halves for an entree serving or one for a side dish. For an easy dinner, the potatoes are great served with mixed greens or your favorite steamed or grilled fresh vegetables. As a side, they go well with grilled meats such as steak.

Preparation is even easier if you bake the potatoes ahead of time and keep them refrigerated for a day or two prior to making the filling. If you're feeling creative, this recipe is very versatile. You can adjust the seasonings to your taste and substitute whatever ingredients you have on hand—from sautéed mushrooms or asparagus to smoked ham or even roasted chicken or turkey. Another way to liven up this recipe is to substitute a flavored cheese, such as Pepper Jack or Garlic Cheddar, for one of the cheeses in the recipe.

California is the nation's leading milk producing state and one of the country's leading cheese producers. In addition to Monterey



California Cheesy Twice-Baked Potatoes.

Jack and Cheddar, the state makes more than 250 varieties of cow's milk cheeses. For more information, recipes and serving ideas for Real California Cheese, visit www.RealCaliforniaCheese.com.

CHEESY CALIFORNIA TWICE-BAKED POTATOES

- 4 large russet baking potatoes (about 2 lbs. total)
- 1 cup sour cream
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped fresh chives or 2 tablespoons dried chives
- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup cooked, crumbled bacon
- $\frac{3}{4}$ cup (about 3 oz.) grated California Monterey Jack cheese
- $1\frac{1}{4}$ cups (about 5 oz.) grated California Cheddar cheese
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground pepper

1. Preheat oven to 450°. Rinse potatoes under cold

running water, scrubbing lightly with a brush if dirty. Prick each one several times with a fork so it won't burst in the oven. Bake 65 to 75 minutes, until skins are dry and crackly, and a small, sharp knife pierces each potato easily all the way through.

2. Remove potatoes from oven and let stand until cool enough to handle. If you wish, this initial baking can take place hours—or even a day or two—ahead of time. If so, wrap cooled potatoes in plastic wrap and refrigerate until you are ready to continue.

3. Preheat oven to 375° for the second baking. Split each potato lengthwise, scoop out the inside from each half, and scrape it into a bowl, leaving outer potato shell about $\frac{1}{4}$ - to $\frac{1}{8}$ -inch thick for stability. Using a large fork or potato masher, mash scooped-out potato coarsely, then add sour cream, chives, bacon, all the Monterey Jack cheese and $\frac{1}{4}$ cup Cheddar cheese. Mix briskly with a fork until blended, but don't worry about making it perfectly smooth. Season with salt and pepper.

4. Divide filling among potato shells, using about $\frac{1}{2}$ cup in each. Sprinkle each with about 1 tablespoon of remaining Cheddar cheese. Place potatoes in a 13x9-inch baking pan, or any baking dish that holds them comfortably. Bake for 20 to 30 minutes, until cheese has melted and tops are lightly browned.

Yields 4 main course or 8 side dish servings.