

Columnists

# Taste Food: Tame the sweet in the sweet potato

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baburns / Lynda Balslev for Tastefood

Hasselback sweet potatoes are ribbed, basted and roasted.

Hasselback potatoes never fail to get a “wow” at the dinner table. These accordion-shaped potatoes are lovely to look at, and a basting method while roasting ensures that flavor permeates the potato and crisps all the fine edges.

Any potato can be prepared this way, including sweet potatoes, which may be the most striking presentation, since they fan out to reveal their orange-jeweled flesh while roasting.



Lynda Balslev

To make Hasselback sweet potatoes, choose long, relatively stable and straight potatoes. The key is to cut as many thin slices as possible, crosswise, along the length of the potato. To do this — without a wayward potato rolling across your cutting board — slice a sliver of each potato lengthwise along its base to stabilize it on a work surface and in the baking dish to prevent any wobbling or tilting.

Then, place the potato on a work surface with a thin cutting board snugged up on either side of it. With a sharp knife, make narrow incisions crosswise in the potato, approximately 1/8-inch to 1/4-inch thick. The cutting boards will prevent the knife from cutting through the base of the potato. If a few bits break off, no worries; just continue to slice them if you can.

Arrange the potatoes in a baking dish and brush them with the spiced oil, making sure that the oil dribbles between all the crevices. Transfer to the oven and roast, basting once or twice if desired. When sweet potatoes roast, they will soften first before they begin to crisp. The potatoes are ready as soon as they are

tender. If you decide to cook them longer to further crisp and char them, note that the interiors will be very soft.

Now, a word about a sweet potato's sweetness: In addition to a being a great source of fiber, vitamins and minerals, these roots have a notable helping of starch. When heated during the cooking process, the starch converts to maltose, or sugar, which delivers and amplifies the potato's sweetness. I like to balance this notable sweetness with spices and fresh herbs, which rein in any rowdy sweetness and round out the flavors of the dish.

These potatoes make a wonderful and decorative side dish. For more embellishment, sprinkle crumbled cheese, such as cotija, or crisp bacon bits over the potato and call it a meal.

### Hasselback Sweet Potatoes

Active Time: 20 minutes

Total Time: 1 hour and 20 minutes

Yield: Serves 4 to 6

4 medium-large sweet potatoes

3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1 teaspoon kosher salt, plus extra for finishing

1/2 teaspoon garlic powder

1/2 teaspoon ground cumin

1/2 teaspoon sweet paprika

1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, plus extra for finishing

1/4 cup chopped fresh herbs, such as parsley, chives or mint

Heat the oven to 400 degrees.

Cut a very thin slice lengthwise from the bottom of each potato to stabilize it. Cut each potato crosswise, as thinly as possible (1/8- to 1/4-inch-thick slices), to about 1/4-inch from the bottom without piercing the base. Place in a baking dish or on a rimmed baking sheet lined with parchment.

Whisk the oil, salt, garlic powder, cumin, paprika and pepper in a small bowl. Liberally brush the potatoes all over and in the crevices with the oil.

Transfer the potatoes to the oven and roast until they are tender and beginning to crisp, 45 minutes to 1 hour, depending on the size of the potatoes. Baste once or twice with the oil, if desired.

Remove from the oven and season with additional salt and pepper. Garnish with the fresh herbs. Serve warm.

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Columnists

# Kathy Kolasa: Real meat, grown in a lab, could be on tables soon

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dgriffin / Deborah Griffin/Daily Reflector///

Kathy

Kolasa

*If you want to wear a face mask to help reduce your risk of catching COVID or other viral diseases, feel free to do so. Just because others choose not to, doesn't mean you have to take yours off. Eat healthy, get some daily activity and wash your hands frequently.*

Q I enjoy your columns on new foods. Keep the information about new ways to get protein coming, please. HJ, Greenville

A The world and science of food are indeed changing to address the need to create a worldwide sustainable food system. Julia Firnhaber, a third-year Brody medical student, who has an undergraduate degree in nutrition, helped me explore today's new food science of cell-cultured proteins. We recently wrote about foods that look like meat but are created from plants. Now, Julia asks you, the readers, "If you could buy and eat a burger that was grown in a lab, would you?"

The plant-based meat market is growing rapidly. People are choosing to follow a vegan or vegetarian diet or a red meatless diet for various reasons including health, environment, religion, ethics and sometimes just personal preference. Some people enjoy products that look like meat but are made from soy or peas or other plants. Others argue you should just learn to enjoy eating foods that are close to their original, unprocessed state.

Can cell-cultured proteins be the next best thing? It may sound like futuristic science fiction, but the future may be closer than we think. This "burger grown in a lab" I asked you about is in development and is made from cell-cultured proteins. We can't buy them yet. Several start-up companies boast that their lab-grown products may be available in as little as a year! It's difficult to get the details but here is a bit of what we know.

Cell-cultured protein is a new type of food science that involves taking a small sample of cells from an animal and growing the sample in a lab where the cells can be selected for the best quality, taste and texture. Once the cells have multiplied, they are processed into a product that is sold to a company that will mix these proteins with fat, seasonings, or other ingredients, to create the perfect product.

Culturing cells is not a new technique; it's actually used commonly in the medical field as a way to study disease processes, new medications and vaccines! One company claims that their process involves only taking a "sesame-seed sized sample of cells" into which they can make 80,000 burgers without harming any animals. As innovative as this process sounds, it still needs to be approved by the FDA and/or the USDA.

These are two regulatory agencies that oversee the labeling and safety of food and agricultural products. They still have quite a bit to figure out before granting approval for cell-cultured meat proteins. For starters, it is still unclear which agency is responsible. The FDA, or the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, regulates foods and medicines, while the USDA, or the U.S. Department of Agriculture, regulates meat, poultry, and eggs.

This new meat grown in a lab is still biologically meat, as it was taken from an animal. There is debate if and how the regulations of traditional meat products apply to these alternative proteins, also called alt-proteins for short. We couldn't find specifics, importantly, what the Nutrition Facts label or ingredient list of a cell-cultured meat burger

will look like. So, we don't know how they will compare with a soy burger, or a burger made with ground beef.

The websites of the companies developing the technology boast of benefits to the environment and more humane treatment of animals. However, even though these alt-proteins are lab-grown, technically it is still meat. We wonder if these products would be acceptable to vegans with concerns about animal production. Another term used to describe these products is "clean meat," likely because desirable features about the product can be selected while growing in the lab. Will they be able to produce a burger with less saturated fat and cholesterol than a traditional burger making it a healthier product? We don't know yet.

Meat, whether it is farm or lab-grown, can play an important role in our diet. It is a great source of protein that is more bioavailable than other forms of protein, meaning that the body can absorb it easily. Eating a diet with a good protein balance can help you maintain a healthy weight as well as steady blood sugars. The protein and other nutrients in meat can help you build strong muscles and bones. In addition to protein, meat is rich in important nutrients including iron, zinc, and vitamin B12.

Of course, you can still maintain a healthy diet without eating meat but family doctors and registered dietitian nutritionists counsel vegans and vegetarians to plan their meatless meals to include nutrients, especially vitamin B12, from other foods or dietary supplements. We will update you on the specifics, as well as the benefits and risks as soon as we have access to more information.

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