

## Consuming Thoughts

by  
**Fay Strickler**

*Penn State Extension Home Economist For Berks Co.*



If you pick up most any magazine at the newsstand you'll see articles about the return to "American Style" or Regional American Cooking." In the articles you'll probably notice that potatoes are featured and you'll find recipes for garlic mashed potatoes, herbed potatoes or even sweet potato oven fries.

America's favorite vegetable is easier than ever to prepare and enjoy when preparation time is reduced by using a microwave oven. Many of the potato recipes encourage the cook to partially prepare or microboil the potatoes in the microwave oven.

Cooking potatoes, and other vegetables, in the microwave not only saves time but valuable nutrients as well. Microwave ovens cook foods in less time, protecting heat sensitive vitamins and preserving more of the natural moisture in foods. One of the heat and moisture sensitive nutrients found in potatoes is vitamin C. Other nutrients include thiamin, folacin, vitamin B<sub>6</sub>, potassium, iron and complex carbohydrates. One medium sized potato provides 50% of the recommended daily allowance of vitamin C, 15% of vitamin B<sub>6</sub>, and iodine and 8% of thiamin, iron and copper—a nutritional bonanza for only 110 calories.

Try to cook potatoes with

their skins on if possible. That's a good way to conserve their nutrients. If you must peel them, keep the parings as thin as possible.

Potatoes retain nutrients better if cooked whole. They may be halved, sliced or diced if shorter cooking time is required. To keep cut potatoes from turning dark, dip them in cold water to which a little lemon juice or ascorbic acid has been added. Don't soak them: soaking potatoes too long can result in unnecessary vitamin loss.

Microbaking potatoes is done at most every household but microbroiling is not very common. To microboil potatoes: Scrub and slice a 6-ounce potato 1/8 inch thick. Place in a microwave dish. Add 1 tablespoon of water and cover with plastic wrap. Microwave on high for 4-5 minutes. Let stand 2 minutes. For cubed potatoes, scrub and cut a 6-ounce potato into 1-inch cubes. Place in microwave dish. Add 1 tablespoon water and cover with plastic wrap. Microwave on high for 5-7 minutes. Let stand 2 minutes. This method is quick and easy and is the base for a variety of toppings.

For low/no calorie toppers try toasted sesame seeds, salsa, dijon or spicy mustard, oil-free salad dressing, whipped butter and poppy seeds, a spoonful of

## Refrigeration Isn't Always Cool

UNIVERSITY PARK (Center Co.) — In the modern American kitchen, the refrigerator is where consumers store most of their produce. But not every food item can chill, say two produce specialists in Penn State's College of Agriculture Sciences.

"Anything that ripens after it's harvested shouldn't be put in the refrigerator," says Peter Ferretti, professor of vegetable crops. "That includes tomatoes, unripe pears, and all melons except watermelon. Chilling

temperatures below 55 degrees Fahrenheit retard ripening."

Ferretti says some fruits and vegetables should not be chilled at all, while other types of produce can be refrigerated with a few easy precautions.

**Tomatoes:** tomato will lose its aroma and flavor after just 40 minutes in the refrigerator. Store tomatoes in a warm, dry area. Vine-ripened tomatoes can be stored this way for up to two weeks. Depending on how fast you want them to ripen, store tomatoes on a counter or on top of the refrigerator, out of sunlight. The warmer temperatures on top of a refrigerator will make a tomato ripen faster.

Store tomatoes so none are touching, especially if produce has cracks or lesions. "The best place to store tomatoes is an aerated basket that allows plenty of air flow."

**Cucumbers.** While sensitive to cold, cucumbers must be refrigerated because they lose moisture rapidly even when they are lightly waxed. Prolonged exposure to cold, however gives cucumbers pitted, mushy spots. Eggplant is affected in similar fashion. Store them in a paper bag in the refrigerator crisper drawer.

**Potatoes and sweet potatoes:** When potatoes are refrigerated, their starch turns to sugar, Gerretti explains. While this condition can be reversed by removing the potatoes from the refrigerator, they will still retain some sugar, which caused them to brown when fried. Potatoes should be kept in a dark place slightly cooler than the normal temperature of the home, such as in a cool cupboard, in the basement wine cellar or storage area, or near the inside wall in a garage. In extremely cold condi-

tions, covering the potatoes with a blanket or burlap will provide protection.

**Tropical fruits:** Any tropical fruit, such as bananas, mangos, papayas and others, should never be refrigerated. Only chill bananas if you don't want them to ripen anymore. The skins also will nearly turn black—the inside flesh can still be normal white. They can also be chilled or even frozen prior to cooking or for a special popsicle-like dessert.

**Citrus fruits:** For oranges, lemons, limes and grapefruits, refrigeration is a good way to preserve quality. Citrus fruits do not ripen further after harvest.

**Winter squash or melons:** winter squash should only be refrigerated after cooking, and melons should be refrigerated only after being cut open. These items maintain their best aroma and flavor at room temperature.

When storing produce, make liberal use of the crisper drawers. In most recently manufactured refrigerators, the crisper drawers can be somewhat adjusted for temperature and humidity. Store fruits and vegetables in paper or plastic bags with holes to slightly increase temperature and humidity.

"Fruits and vegetables should never be stored against the back wall of a refrigerator," Ferretti warns. "The rear wall is the coldest area of any refrigerator and chilling injury or light freezing may occur."

If produce becomes frozen, Ferretti recommends handling the produce carefully. "When a celery or cabbage is frozen the cells are particularly sensitive to touch. Damage and bruising will occur unless they are allowed to thaw slowly with very little handling," he says.

stewed tomatoes and a bit of grated cheese, chive-spiked yogurt or mock sour cream (cottage cheese and lemon juice whipped in the blender.)

Here is a low-fat low-calorie recipe that features potatoes and other veggies in this "Fresh Vegetable Quilt"

### Fresh Vegetable Quilt

2 tablespoons margarine  
1/4 cup sliced green onion  
2 cloves garlic, crushed  
1/2 teaspoon salt (optional)  
dash pepper  
1/2 cup chicken broth  
3 medium potatoes, cubes  
1/4 pound mushrooms, sliced  
1 quart mixed fresh vegetables (broccoli, cauliflower, sliced zucchini)  
paprika

Combine margarine, onion, garlic, salt, pepper and broth in a 9"x13" microwave dish. Microwave on high for 1 1/2 minutes. Add vegetables; stir to coat. Cover with plastic wrap. Microwave on high for 12 minutes, stirring every 4 minutes to redistribute vegetables. Let stand covered for 2-3 minutes before serving. Serves 6. Calories 150, fat 3.5 g., sodium 350 mg, fiber 5 g.

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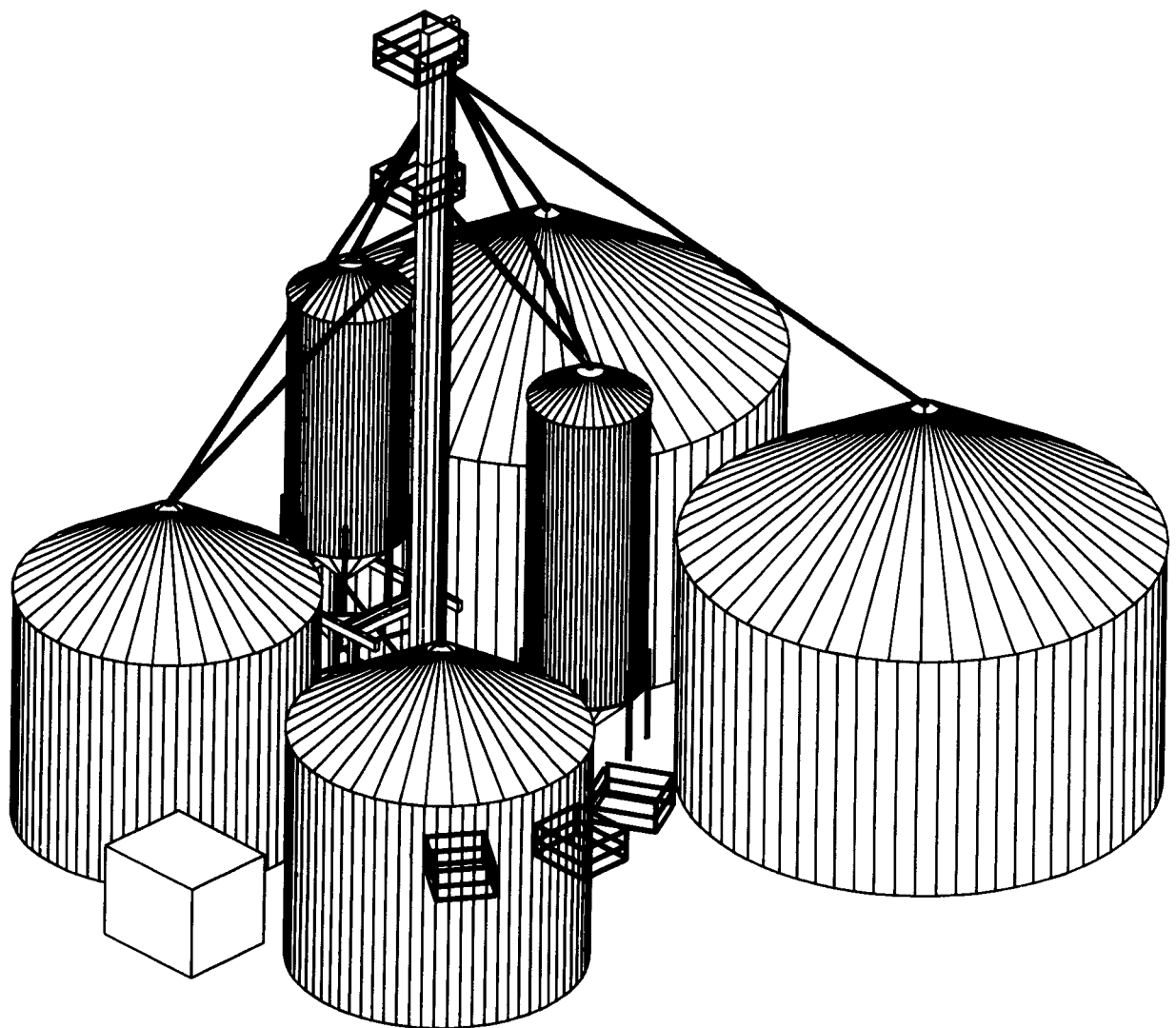
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