Tips for perfecting your potato salad

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FLORIDA TODAY

Stuck bringing potato salad to the barbecue?
It's not as easy as combining chopped potatoes, mayonnaise, diced celery and onion.

There are countless decisions to be made: red-skinned or white-skinned, mustard or mayonnaise, peel on or off?

But regardless of which route you're taking with the signature salad, Chef Deborah Lindsey of Keiser University-Melbourne has some tips for making it a great one:

■ Use the right potato. Waxy potatoes are best for boiling with their smooth, thin skin. They can be white, red-skinned or even purple. (Use all three for a red, white and blue potato salad). Waxy potatoes are sometimes called creamer potatoes. Fingerlings also fall into the waxy category.

■ Boil the potatoes until tender at the center. Use a toothpick or fork to check. Start preparing the garnishes and dressing while the potatoes boil.

■ For garnishes, cut onion and fresh herbs small, so each bite of the salad is not too strong. Celery, dill pickles and other crunchy add-ins can be bigger, but potato should be the largest pieces of all — dice-sized or bigger.

■ If you want a creamy dressing, use mayonnaise or Miracle Whip. Thin it out with a little milk so it's like a heavy cream, which will make it easier for the potatoes to absorb. For a vinegar-based potato salad, bottled or homemade dressing is fine. If you like mustard, add a spoonful to the creamy dressing, or in the case of a vinegar dressing, mix a little bit with the vinegar before adding the oil.

■ Peel the potatoes — if desired — and cut them while they still are warm. Pour the dressing over the warm potatoes. Warm potatoes will absorb the dressing better.