



Back to the Bay

Roasted Potato Salad

ROASTY 🥔 | CREAMY 🥣 | TANGY ✨ | CRUNCHY 🌿

For people who love potatoes.
Even if they're suspicious of potato salad.

From Philly, with Fries

When I lived in Philly, people argued about their favorite cheesesteak spot the way we argue about burritos here in SF. With that much competition, the steak shops had to get creative to stand out. One move that got my attention: fries dusted with this delicious seasoning called Old Bay.

It's a savory, celery-salt-forward spice blend best known for seasoning seafood—but those fries made a pretty convincing case for potatoes, too. It seemed like a perfect flavor to bring into some California cooking.

My version, “The Bay,” keeps that celery-salt backbone, with garlic, onion, and paprika rounding it out. But I wanted a citrusy lift that was a little different, so I reached for sumac.

Made from ground red berries, sumac brings a bright, lemony tang without actually being citrus. And that deep red color? Perfect.

“Back to the Bay” brings that East Coast inspiration home to San Francisco—and gives a little nod to the dahlia's travels in the centennial menu.

For a Potato Salad Skeptic

I don't traditionally love potato salad. So the first challenge was making one I would actually want to eat.

What I DO love is roasted potatoes. Especially with a little of that Old Bay-inspired seasoning. That felt like a good place to start.

Roasting gives the potatoes browned edges and creamy centers. Mustard crema and roasted garlic bring it together, while celery and pickled red onions add the crunch. Chives and a little orange blossom water finish it off.

The crema, English mustard, paprika, and floral note also tie it back to the Centennial Pork Sliders.

Still potato salad. Just one I'd happily go back for.

Grandpa Bill's Lab Notes

Grandpa Bill didn't cook by recipes—he cooked by paying attention. He watched how food reacted to heat, salt, and time, and he trusted his senses more than instructions. These notes exist to capture that way of cooking: not as rules to follow, but as observations worth remembering.

For this potato salad, the contrast is the point: creamy potatoes, crisp celery, tangy onions, and a dressing that brings them together. The potatoes should be good before the crema gets involved. Then it's about tasting, folding, and knowing when to stop.

The Lab Notes that follow aren't meant to be exhaustive or prescriptive. They're here to highlight the moments that matter—the parts of the process where slowing down a little, or doing less on purpose, leads to better food and a calmer cook.

Grandpa Bill's Lab Notes

On Giving Potatoes Some Space

Wet potatoes and crowded pans make browning harder. Dry them well and give them room. You're after roasted edges and creamy centers, not steamed potatoes wearing seasoning.

On Finishing the Roast

Color doesn't tell the whole story. Taste a larger piece: the center should be creamy, without that slightly firm, undercooked bite. Dressing won't fix a potato that left the oven early.

On Crema

Mexican table crema brings a rich, pourable texture without sour cream's pronounced tang. That milder base gives the mustard room to shine. Look for "crema mexicana" labeled table cream; "crema agria" is the sour-cream-style version. Sour cream works in a pinch, but expect a tangier dressing and hold off on the vinegar.

On Mustard and Flowers

Colman's brings a sharp kick; orange blossom water brings perfume. Both belong here, but neither needs to take over. Start with the measured amounts and taste before getting enthusiastic.

On Keeping the Contrast

Cold potatoes hold together better when folded with crema. Add the crunchy bits gently, then taste the finished salad cold. That's the version you're serving.

Ingredients

Serves 8 as a side

Prep: 20 min | Roast: 30–40 min, plus chilling | Finish: 10 min

Produce

- 2 lb Yukon Gold potatoes
- 2–3 celery stalks ($\frac{3}{4}$ cup diced)
- 1 small bunch chives (3 tbsp chopped)
- 2 large garlic cloves
- 1 medium red onion, if making the pickles

Dairy

- $\frac{1}{2}$ cup Mexican table crema (such as Cacique, white lid)

Spices & Seasonings

- Grandpa Bill's The Bay seasoning, to taste
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp Colman's mustard powder
- $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp sweet paprika
- Fine pink Himalayan salt, to taste

Bottled & Pantry

- 2 tbsp avocado oil, plus a little for the garlic
- $\frac{1}{8}$ tsp orange blossom water
- Up to 1 tsp champagne vinegar, optional, for dressing
- $\frac{1}{3}$ cup pickled red onions, drained—or make a batch:
4 fl oz champagne vinegar ($\frac{1}{2}$ cup), 1 tbsp sugar,
salt to taste, and $\frac{1}{2}$ cup water

Prep · Build · Finish

Prep

Set up: Heat oven to 450°F. Wash potatoes, leave skins on, cut into ¾-inch pieces, and dry thoroughly.

Chop: Dice celery and chop chives; refrigerate.

Garlic: Peel cloves, drizzle with a little oil, and seal in a foil packet.

Build

Roast: Toss potatoes with 2 tbsp avocado oil and The Bay seasoning until evenly coated. Spread in one layer on sheet pans. Roast 30–40 minutes, turning around 20 minutes. Taste a roasted potato and add more seasoning if you'd like.

Roast garlic: Cook the packet alongside the potatoes, checking from 15 minutes, until soft.

Pickle: Thinly slice onion into half-moons. Heat ½ cup vinegar, ½ cup water, sugar, and salt until dissolved. Pour over onion in a heatproof container. Cool briefly; refrigerate.

Chill: Spread cooked potatoes in shallow layers and refrigerate promptly. Unwrap garlic, mash, and chill separately in a shallow container.

Dress: Mix crema, roasted garlic, mustard, paprika, orange blossom water, and salt. Add the optional vinegar to taste; refrigerate.

Finish

Fold: Gently combine cold potatoes and dressing, then fold in celery, chives, and ⅓ cup well-drained pickled onions.

Taste: Adjust seasoning while cold.

Serve: Keep refrigerated until serving.