



**CHEESE:** We are smitten with the sharp, edgy, melty Michigan-made Pinconning cheeses found in the dairy end-cap at Ebels General Store in Falmouth.

**SPICES:** Greet the wooden gnomes outside Alden Mill House and enter an old world spice emporium where you can get pepper and paprika that actually pack a punch. (Say that five times fast).

**HERBS:** Bear Creek Organic Farm in Petoskey keeps ya local year-round.

**CHIPS:** After their turn in the oven, these gooey cheesy potatoes need a bit of crunch and a kiss of additional saltiness. Great Lakes Kettle Cooked Originals use, yep, Michigan potatoes, cooked in small batches.

**SKILLET:** Grab a sturdy 12-inch cast iron that would make a lumberjack mess hall cook proud at Cutler's in Petoskey or Mary's Kitchen Port in T.C. Note: this recipe also fits perfectly in a 13x9-in. baking dish.

**POTATOES:** Starchy, sauce-smoothing Russets are the tater for the job. Look for the sticker with Kitchen Farms—4th-generation Elmira grower—on bags at Meijer. Slice potatoes 1/8-inch with Kyocera Adjustable Mandoline, at Crystal Crate & Cargo in Beulah.

**MILK:** Go whole for this dish. Shetler Family Dairy in Kalkaska has you covered.

# Please Pass the Cheesy Potatoes

MICHIGANDERS ARE POTATO PROUD WHEN IT COMES TO OUR ULTIMATE GET-TOGETHER DISH. SPOON RIGHT IN AND SEE WHY.

BYLINE BY EMILY BETZ TYRA // PHOTOS BY DAVE WEIDNER

A switch flips in November when dusk comes by the time we get home. It's the only cue many of us need to tug on cozy clothes...and unleash our down-home cooking tendencies. Pastas, potatoes and other carbs stashed in the back of the pantry get comfy with the dairy products in the fridge. It feels instinctual, like we're modern pioneers raiding the root cellar for tuber or two, then hitting up the larder for some cheese.

As an editor, keeping fresh on food trends is part of my job. I celebrate regional preferences, and especially cherish the things that are purely Michigan. So I eagerly took the bait when Google researchers revealed the most Googled Thanksgiving recipe in every state in a digital map that went viral on the web.

Oh, Michigan, you did not disappoint. Cheesy potatoes for the win.

Fluffy mashed and marshmallow-topped sweet potato casseroles are invited to our collective Thanksgiving table, but it's not a good time until the cheesy potatoes show up, like the fun aunt who gets everyone laughing through awkward pauses and puts hearts at ease.

Cheesy potatoes certainly have my heart. They were my Midwestern mom's mightiest dish, and she taught me how to make them with convenience products: Ore-Ida potatoes, cream-of-whatever soup, a tub of sour cream, lots of mild cheddar and a blanket of buttered Kellogg's Corn Flakes, or, to my delight, potato chips that she let me crush in a Ziploc. My sister and I tried a skinny edition of the mother recipe when we were in our 20s and

abandoned it quickly. Mom, as usual, was right.

The cornflake-topped variety was my go-to when I lived in downtown Traverse City and worked as a young staffer at this very magazine. My grandparents drove down on certain Sundays from Northport to have dinner with my husband and me. We were totally just kids. I was freaked out that the homemade French dressing was not holding up to Grandma's and Andy was hoping that the steaks from Maxbauer Meat Market would not be overcooked when we sliced into them. But we always had cheesy potatoes on the menu as our saving grace.

Our 1930's Cape Cod had a heavy swinging door from the kitchen to the dining room, and I swept through it with a molten-hot pan of cheddar-cloaked creamy potatoes with their gilded crust, and left all my screw-ups behind in the kitchen. I set the cheesy potatoes on the table—Grandma probably nudged a potholder under them just before I did—with my heart overflowing. They were going to be good. Papa took giant scoops, ate them with gusto along with the black, crispy steaks. I always sent him with the rest home, my tiny gesture after all the kindnesses he gave me, including slipping me a twenty for those steaks we had burned. He would call me the next day and say how delicious these potatoes were for breakfast with his eggs.

As much of a grasshopper cook I was at the time, I just kept at it. I became a food reporter at Traverse Magazine, watching the true pros in our Up North farms, creameries, and restaurant kitchens, then later editor

at a national food magazine, before returning to my Traverse roots. And as I observed, I became a bolder cook. I got out the mandoline and shingled thin potatoes in the pan like a cobbled roof on a snug cottage. I made a roux then added Shetler Family Dairy milk and fresh cheese made nearby. I even forsake Mom's corn flakes, showering experiments like crispy local leeks on top. If people were over, I said "look away a second" and grated on even more cheese before I put the whole hefty dish in the oven to get golden and the snowy potatoes to become soft and creamy and ready to dig into.

The best part: as artisan or as 80s old-school as the ingredients that go into it, cheesy potatoes are always come-together food. Easy to share and to offer seconds. Party potatoes. And that's one more funny thing, I don't believe Google counted in its official Thanksgiving food tally by state all the pet names we have for cheesy potatoes. Party potatoes, hashbrown casserole, cheesy scalloped potatoes, and classic au gratin—more like "awgrotten" the way we say it.

So who's bringing the cheesy potatoes? I hope you are. ■

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**FALL COMFORT.** These cheesy recipes will warm you from the inside out. MyNorth.com/ComfortFood





# *The* Ultimate UP NORTH CHEESY POTATOES

WE STARTED WITH ELMIRA-RAISED RUSSETS AND KEPT GOING.  
EVERY BITE OF THIS CRISPY, MELTY SIDE DISH SINGS OF THE LAND IT  
COMES FROM: GOOD OL' NORTHERN MICHIGAN.

- 4 Tablespoons butter  
(plus additional for greasing skillet)
- 1 teaspoon ground mustard
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ½ teaspoon pepper
- ½ teaspoon paprika
- ⅛ teaspoon nutmeg
- ½ teaspoon fresh thyme
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- ¾ cup all-purpose flour
- 2 cups whole milk
- 2 cups grated sharp Pinconning  
OR cheddar cheese
- 1 ½ cups grated mild Pinconning  
OR mild cheddar cheese (divided)
- 3 pounds russet potatoes, peeled  
and thinly sliced
- ¼ cup grated Parmesan
- ¾ cup crushed potato chips
- Minced chives
- Additional fresh thyme

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. In a large pot or Dutch oven, melt butter over medium heat, add spices and garlic and cook 1 minute or until fragrant. Whisk in flour, cook while whisking 3 minutes.

Whisk in milk, smoothing out any lumps. Bring to a boil. Immediately reduce heat and simmer, uncovered, until thickened slightly, about 5 minutes. Gradually stir in 2 cups sharp Pinconning (or sharp cheddar) and 1 cup mild Pinconning (or mild cheddar). Add potatoes and toss to coat. Simmer in sauce for 5 minutes.

Pour potatoes into a well-buttered 12-inch cast iron skillet. Top with remaining ½ cup mild cheese and ¼ cup Parmesan, and bake, loosely covered with foil for 25 minutes. Remove foil and bake 15 minutes more or until cheese is bubbly and potatoes are tender. Carefully remove from oven (handle and pan are hot!). Sprinkle with crushed potato chips, chives and thyme. Serves 8-10.