



# T'was the Night before Christmas & Twice-Baked Potatoes

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*T'was the night before Christmas and all through the house ... Not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse.*

**Whoaaaaaaaaaaaaa! Back up the train** there Bucko. I don't know whose house you're talking about there but it certainly could not have been ours. We didn't just stir; my sister and I practically shook with much too much excitement. And when my brother came along, he just added to the pandemonium. Sure, the stocking were hung but it took a good long time to get us all nestled and snug in our beds. First, there was dinner to ignore and then Mr. Moore's poem to read. Next, we insisted on fixing a plate of cookies and a glass of milk for Santa, plus a carrot for Rudolf. Eventually we were dragged upstairs and hustled into our jammies. More wired than weary, we bounced on the beds, danced and pranced and belted out several choruses of Jingle Bells. Finally, Mom managed to get us into bed if not to sleep.



**As for Mom and Dad, forget about settling in for a long winter's nap.** More often than not, Dad was up to the wee hours assembling toys or bicycles. Without a doubt, at least one bolt or doohickey was missing and batteries were never included. Mom cheered him on and finished any last minute wrapping. All that aside, my mother was never the type to wear a kerchief, to bed or otherwise.

It might have taken awhile but once I conked out, I slept like the dead. My sister Brenda was another story. She didn't need the prancing and pawing of tiny hooves to send her flying out of bed. If one of the dogs yawned or rolled over, it was enough to wake her (if she actually fell asleep). At three, maybe four in the morning, down she crept to the living room to investigate the tree. A few times, she managed to wake me and invited me along but I stayed put. What if we interrupted Santa? He might take offence and leave in a huff, taking our presents with him! Or maybe I was too cozy to leave my warm bed.

As far as I remember, she never caught Santa in the act but she must have come close a few times. She checked to see if the jolly old elf had eaten all the cookies, inspected the nametags on the largest present and shook a few for effect. Much to her frustration, by the time she returned to our bedroom, I was usually back in dreamland.

But not for too long. We always prided ourselves on being one of those families that woke before dawn on Christmas morning. (We still do.) Every house, up and down Jackson Road, was dark. All except ours and the Hailers across the street. Mom and Dad grumbled a bit but they weren't fooling anyone. We knew they were as excited as we were to see what Santa had brought.



Merry Christmas and bon appétit!

## Twice-Baked Potatoes

*Beef tenderloin and twice-baked potatoes continue to be a Christmas favorite at our house. Enjoy!*

1 russet potato per person  
Sour cream, about 2 tablespoon per potato  
Butter, 1 or more tablespoon per potato  
Freshly grated Parmigiano-Reggiano, 2 or more tablespoons per potato  
Pinch nutmeg  
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Pierce the potatoes with a sharp knife, place them directly on the rack in the center of the oven and, turning after 30 minutes, bake until tender, about 1 hour total.

Remove potatoes from the oven and reduce the heat to 375 degrees.

Let the potatoes cool for about 10 minutes. Holding the potatoes with an oven mitt or towel, cut a thin slice off the top of each potato. You can discard the tops or use them to make potato skins.

Leaving the skins intact, carefully scoop most of the potato out of the skins into a bowl. Be careful to leave enough potato in the skin to keep it from collapsing.

Run the potato through a potato ricer or mash with a fork. Add the butter, sour cream and half of the cheese and sprinkle with nutmeg, salt and pepper. Gently stir to combine; you don't want to overwork the potato or it will turn to glue.

Season the potato skins with salt and pepper. Carefully and generously, fill and mound the skins with mashed potato. Pack the potatoes in a baking dish just large enough to hold them and sprinkle the tops with the remaining cheese.

*The potatoes can be made ahead to this point. Cool to room temperature, cover and refrigerate. Remove the dish from the refrigerator about 1 hour before baking to bring to room temperature.*

Bake the potatoes at 375 degrees until heated through and golden, about 30 minutes. Serve immediately.

## Potato Skins

Leftover potato skin tops  
Kosher salt and freshly ground pepper to taste  
Butter, melted  
Olive oil  
Cheddar cheese, grated  
Bacon, chopped and cooked until crispy  
Sour cream  
Chopped chives

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

Combine the melted butter and olive oil, about 1/2 teaspoon each per potato skin. Brush the outside and the inside of the skins with butter and oil and sprinkle the inside with salt and pepper.

Place the potato skins on a baking sheet, skin side up and bake at 400 degrees for 5 minutes. Flip the skins and bake until the edges start to brown. Sprinkle each potato skin with a little cheddar and a few pieces of bacon and continue baking until the cheese melts and starts to bubble, about 3 minutes. Top each potato skin with a small dollop of sour cream, sprinkle with chives and serve immediately.

