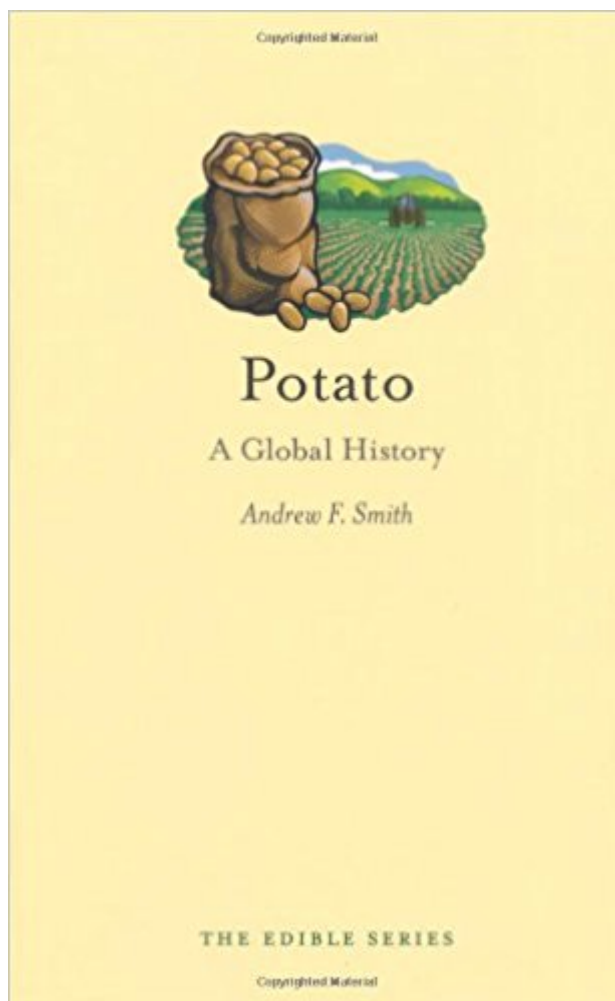


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# Potato: A Global History (Edible)



## Synopsis

From obscure Pre-Columbian beginnings in the Andes Mountains to global popularity today, the story of the potato is one of rags to riches. In *Potato*, esteemed culinary historian Andrew F. Smith reveals the captivating story of a once lowly vegetable that has changed the world and continues to change the world. First domesticated by prehistoric people in the Andes, the potato has since been adopted by cultures around the globe. For instance, the potato was aggressively adopted by cooks in India and China, where it has become a dietary staple. In fact, these two countries now stand as the world's largest potato producers. Nonetheless, despite its popularity, in this era of both fast food and health consciousness, the potato is now suffering negative publicity regarding its low nutritional value. Its health benefits continue to be debated, especially considering that the potato is most often associated with the ubiquitous but high-calorie french fry. *Potato* is a captivating read that provides a concisely written but thoroughly researched account of the history, economy, politics, and gastronomy behind this beloved starch as well as recipes. As loaded with goodies as a well-dressed baked potato, this book is comforting and satisfying.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"As food historian Andrew F. Smith shows in *Potato: A Global History*, even the lowly spud packs a lot of colorful history, including a fleeting aphrodisiacal reputation: It was described by one

16th-century British writer as a lust-enhancing “evasive root.” The potato is such a staple today that few who enjoy it realize that it was known only in Latin America until conquistadors returning to Spain introduced it to their countrymen. (Wall Street Journal) “We are quite taken with the short but engagingly readable Edibles series of handsome little books on basic, well, edibles, as in the cultural and global history of one type of food or beverage. Originating in England from Reaktion Books but written by foodie journalists or food science academics on both sides of the Atlantic, these spritely, much-illustrated books are a peruser’s delight.” (Toronto Star) “A fun, smartly written series appropriate for a popular audience that likes to eat . . . the Edible series books provide level-headed and enjoyable overviews of food culture . . . These will create a little library that any foodie will be proud to show off . . . aesthetically pleasing volumes with decent content that would make good presents.” Winterthur Portfolio, on the Edible series (Winterthur Portfolio)

Andrew F. Smith teaches culinary history at the New School, New York. His other books include The Encyclopedia of Junk Food and Fast Food and Hamburger: A Global History, the latter also published by Reaktion Books.

In this thought provoking piece of nonfiction, Smith introduces a topic that an average person would not normally consider: the significance of the potato. In a very concise, but to the point manner, he exposes how this odd looking tuber has shaped the course of human history. His straight forward writing style could be compared to that of an elaborate set of notes. Smith saturates every page with fact after fact, yet his ability to condense thousands of years worth of history into 176 pages allows this book to be easily comprehensible read. Author of the book Potato A Global History, Andrew F. Smith is a writer and lecturer who focuses on culinary history and food. Smith teaches culinary history at the New School in New York however along side he is the editor of the Edible series (including Potato) and an author for multiple other books. Smith’s knowledge about culinary history is present throughout the book Potato as the reader learns the journey of the Potato from its beginning to how it has changed the world. Although there were many aspects of the book that made the history of the potato appealing to its readers, author Andrew F. Smith used too much repetition throughout the book. The parts about the potato famine all seemed to be the same information said over and over again. Also, despite there being many pictures for modern potatoes and foods, the more helpful illustrations seemed to be left out. For example, a picture of potatoes with blight vs. potatoes without blight would have been helpful. Furthermore, Smith did not seem to

know much about the ancient potato crop even though the whole entire novel was supposed engage the reader in the HISTORY of potatoes. More than half the book was written about the potatoes in the modern world (the fast food industry) which is information that many people are already familiar with. Approximately 1/4 of the book was written about the past, 1/4 about modern potatoes, and most disappointingly, 1/2 filled with potato recipes that do not teach the reader any intellectual information. Lastly, even though the book covers a large amount of time, it often doesn't go into enough detail about the topics the author chose to write about. The scope of the information is broad, not deep, and this is very frustrating to the reader because facts are not explained completely and no topic is really explored fully. The book gives a general idea, but ends up being boring because the author doesn't spend the time to delve into the subject matter. Despite this criticism, the limiting number of pages from the book were full of ways to enrich one's knowledge of potatoes. Because the book was slightly centered on a more modern view of potatoes, it gave an insightful look on how potatoes have affected the world over the last few centuries. Smith could clearly explain the different ways in which potatoes affected different parts of the world, whether it was through the versatility of the potato, its low cost to manage, or its taste. His retelling of how the potato ameliorated or destroyed the conditions of countries was very informative and easy to follow. Smith also illustrated the potatoes effects on different regions and how the spread of the potato crop helped different regions connect and diversify. Also Smith does something that is, frankly, very hard to do: He wrote a whole book about potatoes that actually kept me engaged.

Potato is from the Edible series of 18 books that give a brief history of cuisine. Here Smith takes us on a 12,000 year journey covering the Andes, the Spanish conquests, tough times of war and famine, irrigated Idaho fields, and the Golden Arches. In many cases the intended audience seeks the culinary aspects such as how one prepares cottage fries. Smith covers most of the history and does a nice job with cultural considerations. Those seeking details on production methods and economics, genetics, or impact of the potato on society will do better elsewhere. And Smith does not give us any insight into the bigger than life personalities like Jack Simplot and Ray Kroc who made and lost fortunes betting on the spud.

I did not buy this book but I have a question about the book. I could not find the question bar so I'm asking it here. In the title it says (edible), does that mean the book is written on rice paper or something and I can eat it? Maybe it is written on a paper made from potato. That would be funny

because it is a book about potatoes. And I included a picture of a cat

Very nice little book covering the .of this wonderful food source. There are even a few great recipes at the end that verify the versatility of this great root.Highly recommended.

This was a good read for me. I enjoy learning about the history of food and this little book didn't disappoint!

In my opinion this book has a rather odd bias against the Irish people, it glosses over the Irish potato famine and makes claims that the Irish immigration to the US added to US isolationism in the two world wars. Why doesn't the author leave his English bias towards the Irish out of this book and talk about the potato?

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