

# How to add big, fresh flavor to classic cheesy funeral potatoes?

[Midwest Foodie \(www.vchale.com\)](http://www.vchale.com)

## Elevating a Beloved Comfort Food

Funeral potatoes hold a sacred place in the heart of Midwest cuisine. This quintessential comfort dish, with its creamy, cheesy potatoes and often crunchy topping, is a staple at potlucks, family gatherings, and, yes, even funerals. While its classic appeal is undeniable, sometimes the rich, heavy nature can leave us longing for a touch of brightness and fresh flavor. The good news? You can update this beloved classic without sacrificing an ounce of its comforting charm.

Adding big, fresh flavors to funeral potatoes is all about strategic inclusions that cut through richness, add a pop of color, or introduce unexpected aromatic depth. It's about balance, enhancing what you already love with elements that make each bite feel a little lighter and more exciting.

## The Foundation: Understanding What Makes Them Great

Before we start adding, it's crucial to appreciate the core components of funeral potatoes: tender potatoes (often shredded or diced), a rich, creamy sauce (usually made with cream of chicken soup or sour cream), plenty of cheese, and a crispy topping (cornflakes or crushed crackers). Our goal isn't to reinvent the wheel, but to introduce complementary flavors that elevate, rather than overpower, this familiar base.

Think about where you can introduce freshness: in the sauce, mixed with the potatoes, or as a vibrant garnish. Each approach offers a different way to inject life into the dish.



## Brightening with Fresh Herbs

Herbs are perhaps the most straightforward way to add immediate fresh flavor. They introduce aroma, color, and a herbaceous punch that can cut through the richness of cheese and cream. Consider:

- **Dill:** Its slightly anisy, fresh flavor pairs beautifully with potatoes and creamy sauces.
- **Chives:** Mild oniony notes add a gentle allium kick.
- **Parsley:** A classic for a reason, flat-leaf parsley offers a clean, green finish.
- **Cilantro:** For those who love it, cilantro can add a vibrant, zesty edge, especially if you lean into a more Mexican-inspired flavor profile.

Stir finely chopped hardy herbs like rosemary or thyme into the potato mixture before baking, and sprinkle delicate herbs like dill, chives, or parsley generously over the top just before serving for maximum impact.

## Zesty Citrus and Acidic Touches

Acidity is a powerful tool for brightening rich dishes. It provides a counterpoint to fat and salt, making the overall flavor profile more dynamic and less heavy. Don't be afraid to experiment with:

- **Lemon Zest:** A little finely grated lemon zest (added at the end) can work wonders, offering bright, aromatic notes without making the dish taste lemony.
- **A Splash of White Wine:** Deglaze your pan with a dry white wine if you're sautéing aromatics, or add a tablespoon or two to the creamy sauce mixture for subtle depth and acidity.

- **Apple Cider Vinegar:** A tiny splash (1/2 to 1 teaspoon) in the sauce can lift flavors without being overtly vinegary.



## Incorporating Fresh Vegetables

While the classic often features potatoes as the sole vegetable, adding others can introduce texture, color, and more complex flavors. Just be sure to pre-cook or finely chop them to ensure they cook through evenly with the potatoes.

- **Diced Bell Peppers:** Red, yellow, or orange bell peppers add sweetness and a lovely crunch. Sauté them briefly before adding.
- **Scallions/Green Onions:** Both the white and green parts offer a mild onion flavor and vibrant color. Stir them into the mix or use as a garnish.
- **Finely Chopped Spinach or Kale:** Wilted and squeezed dry, these greens can add a nutritious boost and earthy flavor.
- **Sweet Corn:** Either fresh or frozen (thawed), corn adds pops of sweetness and texture.



## Punching Up Aromatics

Beyond the classic onion, elevating your aromatics can lay a stronger foundation for fresh flavors.

- **Fresh Garlic:** Minced garlic sautéed gently before being added to the sauce provides a pungent, irresistible aroma.
- **Sautéed Shallots:** Milder and sweeter than onions, shallots offer a more refined aromatic base.
- **Caramelized Onions:** Slow-cooked until deeply golden and sweet, caramelized onions add incredible depth and a hint of umami that complements cheesy dishes beautifully.



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## Smarter Cheese Choices and Toppings

While cheddar is king, exploring other cheeses can introduce different flavor profiles. For toppings, think beyond cornflakes to add fresh texture.

- **Sharp Cheddar & Gruyère Blend:** Gruyère adds a nutty, complex flavor that pairs wonderfully with potatoes.
- **Smoked Gouda:** For a subtle smoky depth that feels gourmet.
- **Freshly Grated Parmesan:** A final dusting of good quality Parmesan adds a salty, umami kick.
- **Panko Breadcrumbs & Herbs:** Instead of plain cornflakes, mix panko breadcrumbs with melted butter and a finely chopped fresh herb like parsley or thyme for a lighter, more aromatic crunch.
- **Crispy Fried Onions & Chives:** A classic crunchy onion topping, enhanced with a generous sprinkle of fresh chives.





## **Putting It All Together: A Recipe for Innovation**

To implement these ideas, consider a combination: sauté shallots and garlic, add a splash of white wine to your sauce, fold in some finely diced red bell pepper and fresh dill, and finish with a topping of buttery panko breadcrumbs mixed with lemon zest and chives. The result is a funeral potato dish that

still delivers on comfort but sings with layers of fresh, exciting flavors.

Don't be afraid to experiment. Start with one or two additions and see how they transform your classic recipe. Your taste buds (and your potluck guests) will thank you for bringing a breath of fresh air to this beloved Midwest tradition.