

Boil first, then mash

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Last year, British schoolchildren (ages six and seven) went to a farm and were baffled by the long, pointy, orange things. (Those who specialize in plant biology have a special term for these strange objects: carrots.) Their older siblings don't seem to be faring much better. A three-year study revealed that modern Scottish schoolchildren lacked skills such as understanding clothing care instructions, sewing a button, and knowing that you boil the potatoes before you mash them. Okay, but let's look at those clothing care instructions. Do you know what it means if you have a square with a solid circle inside and two underlines? What about a triangle with two diagonal stripes? I don't know either. (They mean "Tumble dry, gentle cycle, no heat" and "Use non-chlorine bleach as needed", respectively. More symbols deciphered here.) And while it's true that I can sew a button, I am unable to sew a straight line or with constant tension. I'm sure every generation bemoans lost skills. Our ancestors probably shook their heads in disappointment when their grandchildren demonstrated themselves unable to churn butter, wash clothes by hand, or operate a mangle.

On the other hand, you really ought to know what a carrot looks like and that you boil first, then mash. I doubt carrots and mashed potatoes are going to go out of style any time soon.

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