

THIS WEEKEND'S  
FOOD

# The Super Bowl of chips

Six real Couch Potatoes pick the ones to munch while you watch Sunday's game

The Super Bowl calls for serious snack food: potato chips. Each year we munch \$3.8 billion worth — that's 13 pounds of potatoes per person. And today, choices are overwhelming: Hand-cooked, home-style, kettle-cooked, gourmet, flavored with every seasoning from Cajun spices to jalapeño to vinegar.

We narrowed our Super Bowl of munchies to the super-crunchy, home-style chips called "kettle chips." The latest rage, they are a growing category of snack foods.

Ladened with bags, we went to Dixon, Calif., to visit six supine members of the Couch Potatoes, a group devoted to the fine art of TV watching. Luckily, they were willing to break from their tubes long enough to taste 12 popular brands.

The winner: Eagle Snacks Idaho Russet, by a close shave. Bob's Texas Style took second place.

"Good color and great flavor," said Phyllis Beals, 37, Couch Potato member and office

husband; his wife Alice Adeo, 32, a physician.

The Couch Potatoes was founded in 1976 by "Head Spud" Armstrong. It now boasts 8,000-plus members, who receive a button and a membership card. "We've tried to get a convention together a couple of times," says Armstrong. "But we haven't had much luck. We just can't seem to get people to leave their couches long enough to meet."

The group was enthusiastic about kettle chips, which are cooked more slowly and at a lower temperature than other chips. The result: a crunchier snack with a hearty potato flavor.

National manufacturers, such as Borden and Eagle Snacks, have added kettle chips to their lines. But most chip makers are small companies that serve a particular region. Our field was limited to national and major regional brands.

All but two of the chips are made with Norchip or Atlantic potatoes. (The Maui Chips and Idaho Russet chips are made with russets.)

Although nutrition usually is not the foremost concern with potato chips, only one brand — Grandma

Utz — is fried in lard. The rest are cooked in vegetable oils. Our testers were quick to notice.

**HOW THEY RATED:** Our six couch potatoes judged 12 popular brands of super-crunchy, home-style, "kettle" chips according to taste and texture. Ratings: 1 (worst) to 10 (best).

Chip	Score	Comments
Eagle Snacks Idaho Russet Cost: 6.5 oz./\$1.49	8.0	Dark, rich color. Good roasted potato taste with just the right amount of salt. "Great taste: rich and 'potato-y' with perfect texture."
Bob's Texas Style Cost: 6.5 oz./\$1.49	7.8	Good potato taste, great crunch, lightly salted. "A notch below perfect, not too salty, the right texture, the right color."
The Maui Chips Cost: 16 oz./\$9.50	7.3	Thick chips with a natural, homemade taste. Just the right amount of salt and not too much grease. "Just like my Dad used to make."
Country Made Cost: 9 oz./\$2.15	7.2	Light and airy texture with a fair taste. A bit too greasy. "Good-looking and just the right size. Wonderful golden color."
Borden Krunchers Cost: 7 oz./\$1.59	6.5	OK flavor with a bit of an aftertaste; too much salt. Texture was a little too crunchy; chips tended to break apart.
Eagle Snacks Hawaiian Kettle Cost: 6.5 oz./\$1.49	6.4	Good potato taste, but slightly stale. Just the right amount of salt, but a little too greasy.
Arizona Select Cost: 7 oz./\$1.49	5.5	Nice appearance, but tasted a bit fake. A little too greasy and a poor texture.
HomeTown Cost: 8 oz./\$1.69	5.4	Tasted bland, almost phony. Too oily, but a good crisp texture. "The best-looking chip."
Cape Cod Cost: 7 oz./\$1.59	5.1	Stale flavor with a bit of an aftertaste. Much too greasy, but just the right amount of salt.
Grandma Utz Cost: 11 oz./\$2.09	5.0	Odd taste with little potato flavor. Too greasy with a pale, phony color. "Oil tasted different than others." (Indeed these are fried in lard.)

WEEKEND  
TASTE  
TEST

The winner:  
Eagle Snacks  
Idaho Russet