

SWEET POTATOES

Spanish: acerca de camote **Russian:** sladkiy kartofel' (сладкий картофель) **Vietnamese:** khoai lang

Sweet potatoes are originally from Central and South America. They need a long, warm growing season to develop sweet and robust roots – the part we eat. In the United States, they are most commonly grown by farmers in the South. Some Oregon farmers grow sweet potatoes, too. Both the roots and the leaves are edible and enjoyed. Sweet potatoes come in different varieties – some have orange flesh, while others have yellow or white flesh.



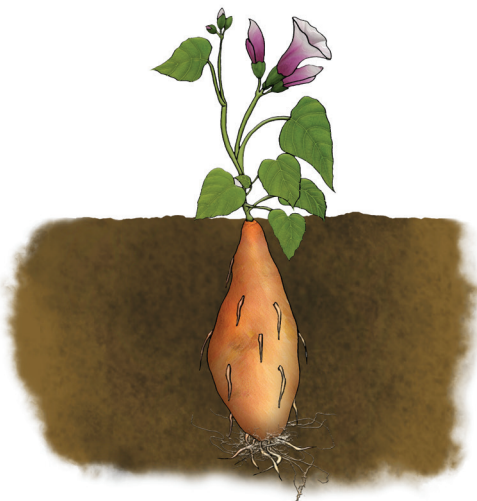
Despite the name, sweet potatoes are not related to potatoes. Also, sometimes confused with a yam, a sweet potato is a completely different species. The yam only grows in the tropics, is much larger than the sweet potato (can grow to be 100 lbs!), and is common in African and Asian diets. However, they can and often are used interchangeably in recipes.

FIND OUT MORE:

<http://nwrec.hort.oregonstate.edu/swpotato.html>

<http://urbanext.illinois.edu/veggies/sweetpotato.cfm>

FROM SEED TO PLATE



Sweet potatoes are related to the vining, persistent, and invasive flower called the morning glory. The vines provide ground cover, quickly spreading across the soil and shooting roots down into the soil via nodes on the vine. Adaptations have been made to create sweet potato plants that form bushes instead of vines for those with limited space.

FIND OUT MORE:

http://urbanext.illinois.edu/veggies/sweet_potato.cfm

http://ohioline.osu.edu/b826/b826_2.html

IN THE GARDEN

Sweet potatoes are great fun to grow! You can plant them in the ground or use large containers. For adventurous gardeners, here are some tips for how to grow your own sweet potato!



SUN: Full Sun



WATER: Water regularly when freshly planted, then occasionally once established. Do not water during the last 3-4 weeks before harvest, to keep the roots from splitting.



SOIL: Make sure your soil has a lot of organic matter by adding nutrient rich compost.



SEEDS: Sweet potatoes are grown from 'slips' that you can buy online or from a garden center. They are potatoes that have sprouted and started to grow stems and leaves.



PLANT: Potatoes like to be "hilled" when planted. To do this, dig a large enough hole for the plant and add extra soil to the base of the plant. Alternatively, dig a furrow to plant in.



SPACE: Plant seed pieces 10-12 inches apart in rows 24-36 inches apart.



CARE: As plants grow, pile soil around the stems as you would potatoes. This is called "hilling." Weed, as necessary, around the plants.



HARVEST: When the leaves start to yellow in the fall, you know it's time to pull up the plant. Use a small shovel, and be careful not to bruise the root. Before being consumed, sweet potatoes can be "cured" so that they store longer and have a sweeter taste. To cure sweet potatoes, keep them in a humid space at 85-90 degrees for 10 days. The sweet potatoes will grow a second skin, which will act as a seal. After curing, store in a cool, dry space.

STORAGE AND HANDLING

- Find sweet potatoes with white, yellow, orange, and, sometimes, purple flesh.
- Avoid sweet potatoes that are pocked with soft, brown or moldy spots, or are sprouting.
- Store sweet potatoes in a dark cool cabinet or drawer. It is best not to store them in the refrigerator!
- If kept cool (55-60 degrees) storage, sweet potatoes will keep for 1-3 months.
- If kept at room temperature, use within one week of purchase.

FIND OUT MORE:

http://www.worldcommunitycookbook.org/season/guide/sweet_potato.html
http://www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov/month/sweet_potato.html

FIND OUT MORE:

<http://www.motherearthnews.com/organic-gardening/growing-sweet-potatoes-zm0z1l1zsto.aspx?page=4>
<http://urbanext.illinois.edu/veggies/sweetpotato.cfm>
<http://www.hort.purdue.edu/ext/sweetpotatoes.html>

IN THE KITCHEN

Sweet potato can be eaten broiled or roasted in the oven, grilled, steamed, or boiled. Sweet potatoes add extra flavor and nutrients to dishes, and are easy to prepare. Though less common in the United States, sweet potato greens are also delicious to eat!

Before cooking, rinse sweet potatoes well to remove any residual dirt. Using a small knife, remove any spots by peeling away the surface. Cut the sweet potato into strips and make sweet potato fries by tossing with oil, salt and pepper, and baking. Add lime, cumin and chili powder for an extra treat! Boil sweet potatoes until tender and mash like potatoes (see below for a recipe). Cut the vegetables into long, wide pieces and throw them on the grill with some oil, salt and pepper. Eat them for dessert by roasting them whole until soft to the touch, cutting in half and topping with butter, coconut milk and/or maple syrup.

Try the classroom recipe at home, with this family-size version:

SWEET POTATO MASH

Serves 6

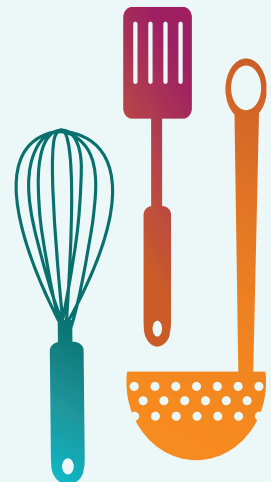
INGREDIENTS

2 lbs. sweet potatoes (4-6 medium)
3/4 tsp. salt
black pepper (to taste)
2 Tbs. butter or milk (optional)

DIRECTIONS

1. Put a medium pot of water on to boil. Scrub sweet potatoes and peel.* Cut sweet potatoes in quarters. When water boils, add sweet potatoes to pot. Lower heat, and simmer sweet potatoes until tender (about 20 minutes).
2. Mash sweet potatoes with a fork. Using a metal whisk with an up-and-down motion also works well. Add the butter or milk, if desired. Season with salt and pepper. Enjoy!

*Note: When sweet potatoes are exposed to air, they begin to brown. To keep raw sweet potatoes from browning, soak them in water with a little lemon juice or vinegar.



FAMILY CONNECTIONS

The family newsletter for sweet potatoes & potatoes can be sent home at the beginning of the month. The newsletter is available in English, Spanish, and Russian. Print the first page only, or add photos and stories to the second page and print both sides for families.



GET PARENTS' ATTENTION!

- Attach the newsletter to the child by attaching a string of yarn to the paper and making a newsletter “necklace” or pinning the newsletter to an article of clothing.
- Attach the newsletter to a drawing or other piece of artwork created by the child
- Get a set of “Ask me about ____” stickers or nametags, or use blank nametag stickers to draw attention to the fruit or vegetable of the month. Send each child home with an “Ask me about sweet potatoes and potatoes!” sticker for the sweet potato and potato month.
- Offer tastes of the recipe of the month at a parent meeting, or when parents pick up their children from your site.

SWEET POTATO VARIETIES



Orange • White • Japanese



ABOUT HARVEST FOR HEALTHY KIDS

Harvest for Healthy Kids is a nutrition program designed to introduce children to a wide variety of fruits and vegetables through their meals and snacks and classroom activities. Monthly family newsletters engage families as partners in helping children to develop healthy eating habits. Harvest for Healthy Kids is a partnership between Mt. Hood Community College Head Start and the School of Community Health at Portland State University.