

Sweet Potatoes

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Sweet potatoes are a member of the morning glory family. This root crop has hundreds of varieties—some bred for their colorful flowers or trailing vines used in landscapes and others for the tasty potatoes. Sweet potatoes require a warm climate for growth and are extremely heat tolerant.

🌱 Grow it

Varieties

- In Texas, the most common food varieties planted are Beauregard, Centennial, Jewell, and Vardaman. The most popular is Beauregard.

Soil Preparation

- Incorporate compost or 19 ounces of 15-5-10 fertilizer per 100 square feet into the top 3 to 4 inches of soil. This will be the only fertilizing needed.
- Work the soil into mounds 8 inches high and 36 inches wide. Space the mounded rows 3 to 4 feet apart, measuring from the peak of each mound.
- Mounded beds allow the soil to drain well and warm quickly in early spring. Moist environments that do not drain well encourage rot and disease.

Planting

- Sweet potatoes are planted by “slips”, otherwise known as vine cuttings.
- Slips can be produced at home, purchased at a local garden store, or ordered from online companies.
 - To produce slips at home, buy healthy, disease-free sweet potatoes from a local market. Clean them and cut them in half. Using toothpicks, suspend each half over a jar of water, submerging half of the piece in water. Place the sweet potato near a window. You will need to change the water regularly. Over the next few weeks, shoots will form on top. When ready to plant, carefully break off the shoots with any attached roots. These are the slips that you will plant.
- In the spring, plant 2 weeks after the last frost, when the soil temperature is over 65 degrees Fahrenheit. You can plant sweet potatoes until at least 150 days before an anticipated soil temperature of 55 degrees Fahrenheit in the fall.
- Plant slips 3 to 4 inches deep and 2 feet apart in each row.

Watering

- During the growing season, maintain even soil moisture. Sweet potatoes need about 1 inch of water each week.
- Take care to water transplants at planting and during the first month of establishment. Slips are extremely sensitive to water stress during this time.
- Stop watering in the last 2 to 3 weeks before harvest to prevent the tubers from rotting.

Care During the Season

- Keep the beds weed-free until the vines have covered the soil fully. Controlling weeds, especially during the first 40 days after planting, will improve yields.

Insects & Diseases

- Leaf spots, nematodes, beetles, cutworms, and weevils may be problematic for sweet potatoes.
- For information on controlling pests and disease, contact your county Extension agent.

Harvesting

- The best time to harvest sweet potatoes is immediately before or just after the first fall frost. Sweet potato leaves turning yellow during this time indicates that sweet potatoes are mature and ready to be harvested.
- Be careful when harvesting sweet potatoes. The delicate skin is bruised easily.
- After harvesting, sweet potatoes must be cured to heal any wounds and allow the starch to convert into sugars.
 - To cure, place unwashed potatoes into a high-humidity environment, such as a plastic bag, at a high temperature of around 85 degrees Fahrenheit for two weeks.
- After this, the sweet potatoes are ready to be stored.



Sun:
Full



Soil:
Loose,
Well-
drained



Planting:
Warm



Harvest:
Late Summer-
Early Fall



Life Cycle:
Annual

Buy it

- Select sweet potatoes that are firm and have bright orange skin. Avoid those with holes, cuts, or decay.

Store it

- Store potatoes in a cool, dry place for 6 to 8 weeks. Keeping the temperature at 50 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit will allow a longer storage time. Warmer temperatures encourage sprouting. Do not refrigerate fresh potatoes.
- For canning and preservation instructions, visit nchfp.uga.edu.

Use it

Sweet Potato Casserole

Course: Side Dish Serves: 12

Ingredients:

Sweet Potatoes

- 4 pounds sweet potatoes baked, peeled, & mashed
- 3 large eggs
- 1½ tsp. salt
- ½ cup dried cranberries
- 1½ tsp. vanilla extract

Pecan Topping

- ¼ cup pecans, chopped
- ½ cup quick oats
- ¼ cup brown sugar, packed
- 2 Tbsp. salted butter, softened

Instructions:

Sweet Potatoes

Wash your hands and clean your preparation area. Rinse sweet potatoes under cool running water prior to cooking.

To bake sweet potatoes, set oven to 400°F and bake whole sweet potatoes for 40–60 minutes or until tender, and then peel. Or a quicker option is to add peeled, cubed sweet potatoes and 1 Tbsp. of water to a bowl, cover with clear plastic wrap, and cook in the microwave for 5 minutes or until tender. Mash the potatoes.

Set oven to 350°F.

Place mashed sweet potatoes in a large bowl. Add the eggs, salt, dried cranberries, and vanilla extract with the sweet potatoes, and stir until well combined.

Spread ingredients into a greased 9x13-inch baking dish.

Pecan Topping

Using a spoon or baking spatula, mix pecans, quick oats, and brown sugar in a bowl. Add softened butter and mix until well combined.

Spread evenly across the top of the sweet potatoes in the baking dish.

Bake casserole for 20 to 25 minutes.



Sausage, Kale, and White Bean Stew

Course: Main Dish Serves: 6

Ingredients:

- 12 ounces lean turkey Italian sausage
- Nonstick cooking spray
- 1 cup onion, chopped
- 1 cup sweet potato, peeled & cubed
- 1½ cups low-fat, low-sodium chicken broth
- 1 can (15-oz.) unsalted white beans, rinsed and drained
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 4 cups kale, chopped
- 1 tsp. rosemary, chopped
- 2 Tbsp. parmesan cheese, shredded

Instructions:

Remove casings from sausage. Coat a large nonstick skillet with cooking spray and heat.

Add Italian sausage and onion to the pan, and cook until sausage browns, stirring to crumble. Drain sausage and return to pan.

Stir in potatoes, beans, garlic, and chicken broth. Bring to a simmer.

Cover and cook for 7 minutes.

Stir in chopped kale and rosemary, and cook for 4 minutes until kale wilts, stirring occasionally.

Serve soup with parmesan cheese.

Learn about it

Like other deep-yellow or orange vegetables, sweet potatoes are an excellent source of beta-carotene, which is easily converted by the body into vitamin A. They are also a healthy source of vitamin C, vitamin B, fiber, and carbohydrates.