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Sweet Potatoes, a Good Choice

By Mary Ellen Fleming, Extension Agent Family & Consumer Sciences

Many people eat sweet potatoes only on Thanksgiving – a pity, since these tuberous roots are among the most nutritious foods in the vegetable kingdom. They possess an intense natural sweetness, which is produced by an enzyme in the potato that converts most of its starches to sugars as the potato matures.

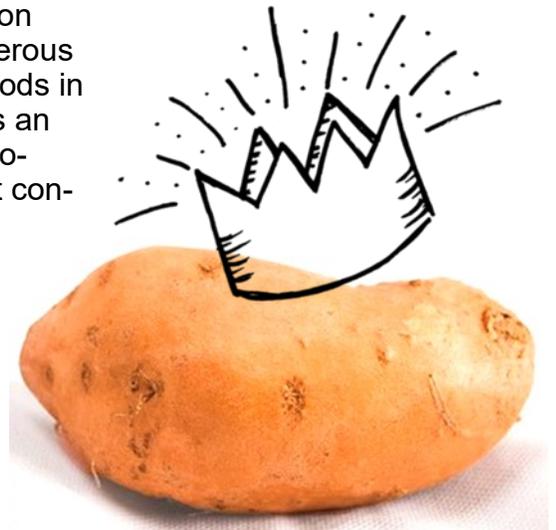
The sweet potato is not related to the white potato but is a member of the morning glory family. A native American plant, that was widely cultivated in Colonial America. The Sweet potato was carried to Europe by Columbus.

Sweet potatoes are starchy root vegetables that are rich in fiber, vitamins, and minerals. They are also high in antioxidants that protect your body from free radical damage and chronic disease. Sweet potatoes are an excellent source of beta-carotene, which can be converted to vitamin A and help support your immune system and gut health.

Sweet potatoes are subject to rapid spoilage; to help preserve them, commercial growers cure them, by storing them at a high temperature and humidity for about 10 days before sending them to market. This process also enhances their natural sweetness.

Storage: After purchase, store them in a cool dry place, such as a cellar, pantry, or garage. Sweet potatoes will keep for a month or longer if stored at 55 degrees F. Use within a week of purchase if stored at room temperature. Never store raw sweet potatoes in the refrigerator, or they may develop a hard core and an “off” taste.

Washing: Sweet potatoes may be somewhat dirty, especially if bought at a farm stand or a farmers’ market. You should brush off any excess dirt before storing, but don’t wash the potatoes until you are ready to cook them, as the moisture from washing can make them spoil faster.



Helping families increase physical activity and enjoy healthy foods ...

Let's Talk

As always, include your child in choosing which vegetables to cook as well as selecting them at the grocery store. Talk about eating a "rainbow of colors", that is, choosing a variety of colors of vegetables to eat. Involve your children in the preparation of the sweet potatoes, whether it's scrubbing them under running water, mashing or serving them. The more involved your child is in the selection and preparation of food, the more likely they will be to eat a variety of foods.



Serving Suggestions: With its naturally creamy texture and sweet taste, this vegetable seldom requires the quantities of butter, sugar, or cream called for in many traditional recipes. To enhance the flavor of sweet potatoes without adding a lot of calories, slice cooked sweet potatoes and place them in a saucepan with a little apple juice; cook over low heat until the apple juice forms a shiny glaze on the potatoes. Or, whip the cooked potatoes with some orange peel, orange juice, or pineapple juice, and season with nutmeg, cinnamon, and ginger.

Here is an interesting recipe for sweet potatoes that is tasty and sweet without all the brown sugar and marshmallows that are usually added.

Recipes for Health

Sweet Potato Puffs

Ingredients:

2 pounds sweet potatoes	1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
1/3 cup orange juice	1 Tablespoon orange peel, grated
1 egg, lightly beaten	1/4 cup nuts, finely chopped



Directions:

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees F and spray cookie sheet with nonfat vegetable spray.
2. Peel and cut potatoes into 1-inch pieces. Place in medium saucepan, cover with water and bring to a boil. Cook until tender.
3. Drain, place in large bowl and mash until smooth. Add remaining ingredients; except for nuts.
4. Spoon mixture onto cookie sheet in 10 mounds. Sprinkle with nuts. Bake 30 minutes.

Baked Sweet Potato Fries

Ingredients:

2 pounds sweet potatoes	1/4 teaspoon garlic powder
2 Tablespoons olive or vegetable oil	1/4 teaspoon paprika or chili powder
1/2 teaspoon salt	1/4 teaspoon powdered thyme
1/4 teaspoon cracked black pepper	



Directions:

1. Preheat Oven to 400° F.
2. Wash hands and food contact surfaces with soap and water. Wash sweet potatoes under cool running water.
3. Peel sweet potatoes and cut into pieces that are approximately 1/4" x 1/4" by 3 inches long.
4. Toss sweet potato fries with oil. Mix salt, pepper and other seasonings in a small bowl until well blended. Then sprinkle mixture on potatoes and toss again.
5. Spread in a single layer on baking sheet. Bake until tender and browned, about 20-25 minutes, flip potatoes over half way through baking.