

## Satisfying Sweet Potatoes

Although sweet potatoes appear on Thanksgiving dinner tables, this vegetable is available all year, peak season being October to December. Since February is National Sweet Potato Month, I will highlight it.

Despite its name, the sweet potato is not related to Irish or white potatoes. Sweet potatoes are root vegetables, meaning the part that grows beneath the soil is eaten.

Sweet potatoes are sometimes called yams in some parts of North America. However, this is an inaccuracy since yams are a different species. True root yams are distinguishable by their blackish/brown, bark-like skin and white or purple-toned flesh. Yams are very rare in North America. Chances are the “yams” found in markets are a type of sweet potato.

There is a variety of sweet potatoes that range in color. Depending on the variety, the flesh can be anything from white to orange to even purple. Copper-colored skin with moist orange-colored flesh is the most common kind.

Sweet potatoes bring more than just their colorful hue to your dinner plate. According to the USDA, sweet potatoes are nutritionally rich in vitamins A and C and high in fiber and potassium. They are high in beta carotene, a plant pigment that is converted into vitamin A. Sweet potatoes are also an example of a carbohydrate that is low in sugar, sodium, and saturated fat and high-nutrient. A medium sweet potato is around 100 calories when baked in the skin.

Many people with health conditions like diabetes make the mistake of thinking all starchy foods are bad and off-limits. The American Diabetes Association (ADA) encourages people to include carbohydrates, fat, and protein in their diet for better blood sugar control.

When buying sweet potatoes, choose fresh sweet potatoes that are heavy for their size and firm with even skin coloration. Watch out for shriveled skin, dark spots, or indentations, as these are common signs of decay. In addition, select similar-sized sweet potatoes so they can each cook at an even rate!

Store sweet potatoes in a cool (55 to 60°F), dry, well-ventilated place such as a basement or root cellar. Sweet potatoes will last up to 2 weeks when stored on the counter. Storing sweet potatoes with an apple can keep the sweet potatoes from budding. Make sure only to put cooked sweet potatoes in the refrigerator. Refrigeration will make them hard in the middle and change their taste if uncooked.

Sweet potatoes are filling and delicious. They may be enjoyed with or without the skin and baked, boiled, fried, microwaved, steamed, or pan-cooked.

When baking sweet potatoes, you can bake them whole or cut them into cubes or wedges and roast them. One of the best methods for making mashed or pureed sweet potatoes is boiling the potatoes. The fastest method of cooking sweet potatoes is microwaving. Steaming sweet potatoes preserves more nutrients and is a faster alternative than baking. In addition, prepare them in an air fryer, pressure cooker, or slow cooker. All in all, you cannot go wrong with any of these cooking methods!

Their natural sweetness pairs well with many different seasonings and can be enjoyed in savory and sweet dishes. Sweet potatoes are commonly paired with cinnamon, nutmeg, cumin, ginger, rosemary, and other spices, along with brown sugar or maple syrup. They also are delicious paired with oranges and apples.

Sweet potatoes have an amazing natural sweetness and flavor. Sweet potatoes are nutritious vegetables and are very versatile in how you can prepare and eat them. Find a sweet potato recipe to showcase at your next meal.

(Sources: [diabetes.org](http://diabetes.org); [food.unl.edu](http://food.unl.edu); [foodnetwork.com](http://foodnetwork.com); [health.com](http://health.com); [ncsweetpotatoes.com](http://ncsweetpotatoes.com); [usda.gov](http://usda.gov))