



Harvest of the Month

SWEET POTATOES

This root vegetable has a skin that may vary from dark yellow to dark red with an orange flesh which, as its name suggests, has a natural, sweet flavor. Although sometimes called yams, true yams are starchy edible roots that are white in color with a tough skin. Yams are native to Africa and are not commercially grown in the United States.



Did you know?



Sweet potatoes are in the morning glory family and likely date back to prehistoric times.



While sweet potatoes are grown mainly for their edible tubers in the United States, in many parts of Asia and Africa they are grown for their edible leaves.



Sweet potatoes grow under the soil and their leaves grow above the ground.



Boiling sweet potatoes retains more beta-carotene (Vitamin A) and makes the nutrient more absorbable than does baking or frying. Cooking with the skin on also helps to retain the nutrients in the sweet potatoes.

Selection

Look for firm sweet potatoes with smooth skin that is free from cracks, bruises, and signs of decay.

Storage

To preserve texture and flavor, avoid storing sweet potatoes in the refrigerator. Store sweet potatoes in a cool, dark place away from heat sources for up to two to three weeks. Cooked sweet potatoes can be stored in an airtight container in the freezer. Add a small amount of lemon juice to preserve color.

Handling

Wash before using. Cut off any brown spots. Use a stainless-steel knife to cut sweet potatoes as a carbon blade may cause the flesh to darken.

Harvest Season

According to the PA Preferred Seasonal Calendar, sweet potatoes are in season in Pennsylvania from August through November.

Nutrition

Sweet potatoes are a good source of Vitamin A, fiber, and potassium. Vitamin A is important in eye health and immune function. Potassium is a mineral that helps muscles contract and maintain normal blood pressure. Fiber is important in digestive function and can lower risk of diabetes, heart disease and some types of cancer.



Cooking



Bake/Roast: Brush sweet potatoes with oil if you like and wrap in foil. Poke holes in the skin with a fork or knife. Bake at 400 degrees F or 40–50 minutes or until soft.



Boil: Cut peeled or unpeeled sweet potatoes into pieces. (If you plan to mash them after boiling, they should be peeled first.) Place in boiling water for 15–20 minutes and drain.



Microwave: Prick the skin of the sweet potato with a fork or knife a few times. Cook 1 potato for 3–4 minutes, 2 potatoes for 5–6 minutes, and 3 potatoes for 7–8 minutes on high. Turn the potato halfway through the cooking time.



Recipe

Oven Baked Sweet Potatoes

Makes about 4 servings

Recipe Source: Sweet Potatoes, Fresh. Household USDA Foods Fact Sheet. United States Department of Agriculture

Ingredients

4 medium sweet potatoes
Nonstick cooking spray
1 tablespoon vegetable oil
½ teaspoon black pepper
½ teaspoon paprika
¼ teaspoon salt
3 cloves garlic, chopped
¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper (optional)

Steps

1. Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Spray baking pan with non-stick cooking spray.
2. Cut potatoes into wedges or strips. Place in a bowl of cold water for 15 minutes.
3. Drain potatoes. Place in a large bowl and coat with vegetable oil. Season with black pepper and salt. Add paprika and cayenne pepper (if using). Place in a single layer on the baking sheet.
4. Bake for 20 minutes. Remove from oven, turn the potatoes over with a spatula, and sprinkle with garlic. Bake an additional 15 minutes or until browned and crisp.



Check out the PA Harvest of the Month website (www.paharvestofthemonth.org) for sources, additional resources, and recipes.

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