

SWEET POTATO



SWEET POTATOES are members of the morning glory family. Often confused with the yam, which is actually a tropical root native to Africa, sweet potatoes are native to South America. Sweet potatoes need a long, hot growing season and are usually available in the Northeast in the fall and early winter months.

STORAGE

- ◆ Farmers cure sweet potatoes at high heat (85-90 F) and high humidity for a few weeks to keep them edible for up to a year. If you want to increase the life of your sweet potatoes, and sweeten them, you can put them in a paper bag in a warm place and wait a month before using.
- ◆ If you do not want to wait a month to enjoy your sweet potatoes, store them in a loose plastic bag in a cool dark place such as a cupboard or closet. They will keep about 3 weeks this way.

PREPARATION

- ◆ **Scrub well before cooking.** For most purposes you can leave the skin on. Some dishes may require peeling, just like other potatoes. While you are preparing your other ingredients, keep peeled and sliced sweet potatoes in a bowl of water to prevent them from drying out if you are not using them right away.
- ◆ You can soak the potatoes in water until they are very tender and then peel and mash them.
- ◆ **Do not substitute sweet potatoes for white potatoes** in a recipe. They can compliment each other but they are not interchangeable because they have different starch contents.
- ◆ The best way to prepare sweet potatoes is to **bake** them in their skins. They can also be **cut into chunks or slices** and mixed with other root vegetables (such as carrots, turnips, beets) and **roasted** in the oven. Try tossing them with a bit of olive oil, chopped garlic, salt and pepper and roasting in a 350°F oven for about 45 minutes, stirring occasionally to make sure they don't stick to the pan.
- ◆ Good partners for sweet potatoes include butter, cinnamon, orange, ginger, brown sugar, maple syrup, pecans, and walnuts. Or simply serve them with butter, salt and pepper!

Nutritional Information

Sweet potatoes, like other orange vegetables, are high in carotenoids. Carotenoids are converted to Vitamin A in the body. Vitamin A is important in vision, growth and development, skin health, immune function and reproduction. Just one 4 ounce serving of sweet potatoes provides the entire daily allowance for Vitamin A. Sweet potatoes are also high in Vitamin C. Vitamin C is important in immune response, wound healing, and allergic reactions. Vitamin C also helps with iron absorption.

Sweet Potato Recipes

Sweet Potato and Apple Casserole

- 6 medium sized sweet potatoes, washed
- 4 medium tart apples (Empire are the best, any will do except Delicious), washed and peeled if desired
- 4 Tablespoons butter
- 1/2 cup apple cider
- 1/4 cup brown sugar
- 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon



Heat oven to 400 degrees. Lightly grease a shallow baking dish (9 x 13 inches). Using a fork, pierce potatoes in several places. Roast them in the oven for 15-20 minutes. They should be almost tender but still feel firm. Let them cool and peel away the skins with a knife. Slice them into 1/4 inch thick rounds. If they are very large, cut each round in half again to make half circles. Cut apples into quarters and cut out the cores. Cut each quarter lengthwise into 1/4 inch thick slices. In a small pan, melt butter. Add apple cider and stir. Put one row of potatoes in the baking dish and one row of apples on top. Do this until all the potatoes and apples are used. Sprinkle with sugar, nutmeg and cinnamon. Pour butter and juice on top. Bake in the oven for 20-30 minutes.

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Chick Pea and Sweet Potato Stew

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| 1/4 cup olive oil | |
| 1 onion, coarsely chopped | |
| 1 leek, sliced | |
| 1 celery stalk, chopped | 2 cups broccoli florets |
| 1 carrot, chopped | 1 Tablespoon soy sauce |
| 1 teaspoon ground coriander | 2 teaspoons pure prepared horseradish |
| 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin | dash of cayenne pepper (optional) |
| 2 sweet potatoes, chopped into medium pieces | 1/8 teaspoon hot pepper sauce |
| 5 cups water | 1 Tablespoon lemon juice |
| 1 cup cooked or canned chick peas | Salt and pepper to taste |



In a large pot, heat oil. Add onion, leek, celery, carrot, cumin, coriander and sweet potato. Saute until onions are translucent, about 5 minutes. Add water, bring to a boil then reduce heat to simmer. Cook covered 30 minutes. Add chick peas, broccoli, soy sauce, horseradish, hot sauce and cayenne, cook 30 minutes more or until sweet potatoes and broccoli are tender but not mushy. Add lemon juice, season with salt and pepper.

Recipe adapted from Urban Organics Today newsletter, Vancouver, Canada, September 28-October 4, 1998.

Sweet Potato Pie (Serves 6)

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| 3 1/2 cups chopped sweet potatoes, boiled until very soft, then drained | |
| 1 cup milk | 1/2 teaspoon ground cloves |
| 3 eggs, beaten | 1/2 teaspoon allspice |
| 1/2 cup maple syrup | 1/4 teaspoon nutmeg |
| 2 teaspoons vanilla extract | 1/4 teaspoon ginger |
| 1 teaspoon cinnamon | 1 unbaked pie crust |



Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Using a food processor (or blender, electric hand beater, or potato masher) blend all the ingredients (except the crust) until very smooth. Pour mixture into unbaked crust. Place pie in oven and bake at 450 degrees for 10 minutes, then reduce oven temperature to 350 degrees and bake 45 minutes more, or until pie is set. Remove from oven. Allow to cool at least 30 minutes before cutting and serving.

Recipe adapted from Cooking at the Natural Gourmet by Debra Stark, copyright 1991 by Scarecrow Enterprises.