



# SWEET POTATO



## Botanical Facts

**Pronunciation:** swēt pə-tā'tō    **Spanish name:** camote    **Family:** Convolvulaceae  
**Genus:** *Ipomoea*    **Species:** *I. batatas*

The sweet potato is a perennial plant of the genus *Ipomoea*, in the family Convolvulaceae (morning glory family). The sweet potato is grown for its tuberous roots. Its botanical name, *Ipomoea batatas*, was derived from the Native Americans of Louisiana who were growing them as early as 1540 and referred to the roots as *batatas*.

The sweet potato is commonly confused with the yam, which belongs to another family. The confusion began over 100 years ago when farmers and stores marketed sweet potatoes as “yams” and the name stuck. Despite recent branding regulations by the USDA, sweet potatoes are still widely known as “yams.” The sweet potato is only distantly related to the potato (*Solanum tuberosum*).

Sweet potatoes are tropical vegetables, grown mostly in California and in the southern states (North Carolina, South Carolina, Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Texas, and Georgia). Hot days and warm nights are important for successful commercial production; however, sweet potatoes can be grown wherever there are 150 frost-free days for them to develop.

Sweet potatoes are propagated from sprouts or vine cuttings called “slips.” Sprouts are grown from plant stock; approximately six to eight bushels will produce enough sprouts to plant one acre of sweet potatoes. Sandy, well-drained soil is best for production. Roots will begin to form in 30 to 45 days and need nitrogen, phosphorus, and potash for optimum growth. A mature sweet potato will have four to five roots of varying sizes, but the majority should have a 1¾-inch diameter and be three to nine inches in length. Maturity is checked by gently lifting the sweet potatoes out of the ground with a shovel and making sure they do not become detached from the vine. If the sweet potato is not mature, then it is lowered back down and covered with soil.

A ½ cup of sweet potatoes is about one cupped handful. The amount of fruits and vegetables each person needs depends on age, gender, and physical activity level. It is important to eat a variety of nutrient-rich foods every day from each food group to maintain good nutrition and health. Fruits and vegetables are available in fresh, frozen, canned, and dried forms. They are sources of many vital nutrients like vitamin A (as carotenoids), vitamin C, folate, potassium, fiber, and other phytochemicals.

## Reasons to Eat Sweet Potatoes

A ½ cup of sweet potatoes is:

- An excellent source of vitamin A\* and vitamin C.
- A good source of fiber, vitamin B<sub>6</sub> (pyridoxine), and potassium.

## Cooking in Class: Paradise Sweet Potatoes

Makes 36 servings at 1 piece of sweet potato and pineapple per serving

### Ingredients:

- 2 (15-ounce) cans sweet potatoes in light syrup, drained
- 1 (20-ounce) can pineapple chunks in 100% juice, drained (reserve ¼ cup juice)
- 1½ teaspoons ground cinnamon

1. Combine sweet potatoes, pineapple, cinnamon, and reserved juice in a large bowl. Mix thoroughly.
2. Place one sweet potato and one pineapple chunk on each paper plate. Serve immediately.

*Nutrition information per serving:* Calories 36, Carbohydrate 9 g, Dietary Fiber 1 g, Protein 0 g, Total Fat 0 g, Saturated Fat 0 g, Total Fat 0 g, Cholesterol 0 mg, Sodium 9 mg