

SWEET POTATO (*Ipomoea Batatas*)



Part Shade



SWEET POTATO

The sweet potato is very nutritious and is an important food in many tropical regions of the world. It is rich in vitamin C and contains more vitamin A than most other vegetables.

An acre of sweet potatoes requires 10,000 to 12,000 plants but 100 to 200 plants will produce an ample supply for the average family.

Plants can be purchased from a nursery, or grown at home by sprouting four or five sweet potatoes in a shallow pan of water.

The Planting and Culture of Sweet Potatoes

Sweet potatoes can be grown as a garden plant over a wide area of the United States. They prefer a sandy soil, but can be grown in a heavier soil if it is worked five or six inches deep. Ridging is also necessary if optimum size and quality are to be produced.

Start preparing ground for sweet potatoes during April. Make a furrow long enough to accommodate the plants you need with 12-to 18-inch spacing. Place an inch or two of well-rotted compost or manure in the furrow. Then ridge up the soil on top of this band of humus. Ridges should be at least ten inches high to prevent roots from growing too deep for easy harvesting.

Don't set out the plants until about a month after the average date of the last frost in your area. Sweet potatoes are members of the Morning-glory family and are very sensitive to frost. Use a rounded stick, like a broom handle, to push the roots of the plants four or five inches deep. Water plants after planting to settle the roots.

The area around the plants should be kept free of weed growth until the vines themselves shade out weeds. Don't worry too much about drought, because sweet potatoes like hot, dry weather.

Harvesting Sweet Potatoes

Dig the potatoes with a pitchfork before frost hits the vines, for frost on the vines can damage the tubers below. To prevent spoilage, be careful not to damage the potatoes during digging. Let them cure on the surface of the ground for several hours after digging. This helps them keep better in storage.

Sweet Potato Storage

If properly cured, sweet potatoes can be stored and enjoyed for several months. This can be done easily by placing the harvested roots in a well-ventilated place where temperatures are fairly high. For best results the temperature should be around 85 to 90°F. (29.44 to 32.22°C.) and should be held in that range for ten to 15 days.

High temperatures are a deterrent to rhizopus rot, a disease which affects potato roots.

Following the curing period, the sweet potatoes should be stored at a temperature of about 50°F. (10°C.) with humidity between 75 and 80 percent. During the storage period the sweet potatoes should not be handled or moved until time for use. Storage temperature below 50°F. usually will favor decay.

Varieties of Sweet Potatoes

Centennial Sweet Potato is a bright copper-skinned variety and a high yielder. Porto Rico, Allgold and Georgia Reds are gaining popularity with sweet potatogrowers. Recommended dry-flesh types are Orlis and Yellow Jersey.