

Versatile Sweet Potatoes Boost Nutrition In Meals

Sweet potatoes are a healthy complement to any meal. They are rich in carotene, a precursor to vitamin A and supply about twice the recommended daily amount of vitamin A. They are also a good source of dietary fiber, potassium and vitamin C. One medium baked sweet potato has only 103 calories.

Dr. Beth Reames, Louisiana State University AgCenter nutritionist, suggests buying sweet potatoes which are well-shaped, and firm with smooth, bright, uniformly colored skins. Avoid sweet potatoes with holes or cuts that penetrate the skin, where decay forms.

Freshly dug sweet potatoes are uncured. They are good boiled, mashed, candied, fried and in many cooked dishes, but uncured potatoes do not bake successfully.

Dr. Reames says that yams must be cured two or three weeks before they will bake. Store cured potatoes in a cool, dry place where the temperature is about 55 F or 60 F. Do not store them in the refrigerator. Chilling the vegetable will give it a hard core and an undesirable taste.

Well-matured, carefully handled and properly cured potatoes will keep for several months if the temperature and storage conditions are ideal. Ideal conditions usually are not possible, however, and potatoes spoil easily. You might wish to cook and freeze them to maintain their high quality.

To bake sweet potatoes, scrub them and dry them well. Rub lightly with oil. Don't wrap in foil for baking. Place on baking sheet. Bake in a preheated 400 F oven for 15 minutes, then reduce the temperature to 375 F, and bake until soft.

To boil sweet potatoes, boil until tender with skins on and drain immediately. Peel and eat or use in your favorite recipe. Most sweet potato dishes freeze well. Save time and energy by making one sweet potato dish to serve and one to store in the freezer.

To freeze cooked, cut yams, and prevent them from darkening, dip the potatoes in lemon or orange juice or in a solution of ascorbic acid dissolved in a little water. When freezing mashed potatoes, stir the juice or ascorbic acid into the potatoes. Pack tightly in containers, leaving 1/2 inch headspace. Cover the surface snugly with a layer of freezer paper or film. Seal and freeze at zero F.

Sweet potatoes may be cooked, but not baked, in the microwave. When microwaved, however, they won't have the sweet, syrupy flavor of oven-baked potatoes.

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