

POP QUIZ: SWEET POTATO OR YAM?

Difference between Yams and Sweet Potatoes

What's in a name? When it comes to the yam, there is a bit of confusion. The truth is what you've been calling a yam is most likely a sweet potato. Even more, it's possible that you've never even tasted a yam!

That sweet, orange-colored root vegetable that you love so dearly is actually a sweet potato. Yes, all so-called "yams" are in fact sweet potatoes. Most people think that long, red-skinned sweet potatoes are yams, but they really are just one of many varieties of sweet potatoes. So where did all of the confusion come from? Let's break down the main differences between yams and sweet potatoes!

Yam vs. Sweet Potato: A true yam is a starchy edible root of the *Dioscorea* genus, and is generally imported to America from the Caribbean. It is rough and scaly and very low in beta carotene. It differs greatly from the sweet potato in taste, texture, appearance and family.

Depending on the variety, sweet potato flesh can vary from white to orange and even purple. The orange-fleshed variety was introduced to the United States several decades ago. In order to distinguish it from the white variety everyone was accustomed to, producers and shippers chose the English form of the African word "nyami" and labeled them "yams."

Even though the USDA requires that orange-colored sweet potatoes always be labeled "sweet potato," most people still think of sweet potatoes as yams regardless of their true identity. Think you know the differences between yams and sweet potatoes? Take our quiz and test your root knowledge!

SWEET POTATO, YAM OR BOTH?

1. I am a tuberous root with sweet moist flesh.
2. I am originally from Africa and seldom sold in U.S. markets.
3. I am super sweet and can grow over seven feet in length!
4. My skin can range from thin and pale to dark and thick.
5. I am toxic when eaten raw, but perfectly safe when cooked.
6. I am known for my high content of vitamins A and C.
7. I have rough skin that is difficult to peel and can even be hairy at times, but it softens when baked.
8. My flesh can sometimes be purple!
9. I have an oblong body with tapered ends.



ANSWERS

1. **Both.** Sweet potatoes and yams are considered tuberous roots, and both are sweet and delicious.
 2. **Yam.** Are you surprised? Yams grow in tropical climates, primarily in South America, Africa and the Caribbean.
 3. **Yam.** They have a higher sugar content than sweet potatoes and can grow to be enormous!
 4. **Sweet potato.** Paler skinned sweet potatoes have white flesh which is not as sweet and moist as the darker-skinned, orange-fleshed sweet potatoes.
 5. **Yam.** Unlike the sweet potato, yams must be cooked to be safely eaten. Preparation is a time-consuming process involving several minutes of pounding and boiling to remove toxins.
 6. **Sweet potato.** Yams do not contain as much Vitamin A and C as sweet potatoes.
 7. **Yam.** Sweet potato skin is thinner and smoother.
 8. **Both.** Purple Okinawan sweet potato is often confused with the purple yam called ube.
 9. **Sweet potato.** It can be short and fat or long and thin, but it will always taper at the ends.
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