

TEACHING TOOL DOWNLOAD

October

HOW ARE SWEETPOTATOES GROWN?

Sweetpotatoes are not grown from seeds, but instead are grown from cuttings called sprouts or slips. Some slips are started in a greenhouse while others are grown by “bedding” seed potatoes in March. Seed potatoes refer to the practice of placing the whole potato in the ground and covering it with a thin layer of soil and plastic.

Sweetpotatoes grow under the ground and are the root of the plant.

Come May or June, the sprouts will be cut and transplanted from the greenhouse or bedding field to a different field. Then, the sprouts are planted in rows using a machine. From here, it takes approximately 90-120 days (without frost) to grow a sweetpotato. These will become the sweetpotatoes that we will eat!



The sweetpotato harvest begins in August with the peak harvest happening in October. Starting in August, the rows are plowed and sweetpotatoes are flipped on top of the ground. They are then either graded or sorted according to their size.



The largest sweetpotatoes are jumbos and the smallest are canners.

Sweetpotatoes need to be harvested by hand because they have thin, delicate skin that is easily hurt and bruised. Most sweetpotatoes are then cured, which changes the starches into sugars, making the sweetpotatoes sweeter and their skin tougher.

Curing takes 4-7 days of 80-85 degrees F e and 80-90 % relative humidity.



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How Are Sweetpotatoes Stored?

After being cured, sweetpotatoes are stored in boxes at temperatures between 55-60°F and 85 % relative humidity. This special storage process enables sweetpotatoes to be available 365 days a year!

How Are Sweetpotatoes Distributed?

Before going to the market, sweetpotatoes are washed, sorted by size and packed. North Carolina is the largest US producer of sweetpotatoes, and North Carolina farmers sell sweetpotatoes all over the world. Some are sold through the NC Farm to School Program and may end up in your school cafeteria!

Sweetpotatoes on Your Table

Once you have purchased or received sweetpotatoes, how are you going to store and serve them?

Sweetpotatoes are stored best in a cool, dry, well ventilated area. For best results, store them in a basement or root cellar away from strong heat sources. Avoid storing sweetpotatoes in the refrigerator, which may lead to a hard center and unpleasant taste.

Check out our article with 52 ways to cook with sweetpotatoes if you need some inspiration for this delicious vegetable in your kitchen or school!

