

SENIOR NUTRITION NEWSLETTER

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It's Sweet Potato Month

This February is National Sweet Potato Month. The history of sweet potatoes started back in 1543 when Spanish explorers found sweet potatoes growing in "Indian gardens" in what became Louisiana. The sweet potatoes were also cultivated in the Carolina area of North America before the European colonization. In Colonial days sweet potatoes were an item of trade and were shipped from the Carolinas to northern cities. The potato was an essential food for all the colonies in the days before modern means of preservation. This root crop kept hunger from the doors of many generations of our ancestors. During the trying times of the Revolutionary and Civil Wars it was a staple food.

Colonial physicians recommended sweet potatoes especially for children because of the sweet potatoes' value in combating childhood nutritional disease. It supplemented the limited diet of the slave population from late summer until spring time. Many slave cabins had root cellars beneath the floor boards. This cellar served as an underground storage space for the weekly rationing of sweet potatoes and other foods.

Sweet potatoes have been around for a long time and continue to grace our tables at dinner time. Sweet potatoes are fat free, sodium free, high in vitamins A and C and a good source of fiber and potassium. A medium, 5" long, 2" diameter sweet potato only has about 130 calories. The US Department of Agriculture and the National Cancer Institute recommend diets that provide 6 mg of beta-carotene a day. The ideal way to get the recommended amount of beta-carotene is by including bright orange and dark green vegetables in your diet. An easy orange vegetable to include in your diet is the sweet potato, which contains four times the recommended amount of beta-carotene.

Over the years there has been some confusion between Sweet Potatoes and Yams. Are they the same? The orange vegetables you see labeled "yams" in many grocery stores are actually **sweet potatoes**. Yams are a completely different vegetable and belong to a separate plant family. **Sweet potatoes** have traditionally been referred to as "yams" in parts of the US and Canada—creating confusion on the real identity of these root vegetables.

True "yams" grow on a tropical vine that is rarely cultivated in the US. They are popular in South and Central America, and in parts of Asia and Africa. The flesh of yams is typically white or yellow, but may also be purple to pink. They vary in size from that of an average potato up to 7 ½ feet long and can weigh up to 120 pounds. Yams are high in vitamin C, fiber and potassium but have less vitamin A than **sweet potatoes**. Yams can be prepared much like **sweet potatoes**. However, to find them you will need to locate a market that specializes in international foods.

Sweet potatoes taste great baked and eaten as is, or added to casseroles, salsa, and even desserts. Sweet potatoes make great dessert ingredients and can be included in dishes like **sweet potato** pudding, sweet potato pie and sweet potato cookies. They also work great in quick breads and muffins.

Sweet potatoes, like the favorite Idaho potato, can be baked in the oven with little to no prep time required. There are a couple of methods you can use when oven baking. Both require a temperature of 450 degrees Fahrenheit and about 30 to 45 minutes in the oven, depending on the size of the potato. For the simplest -- and healthiest -- simply scrub the potatoes clean and put them directly in the oven on the middle rack. The skin will develop a delicious light crunch as the sweet potato cooks.

If you want to treat yourself, coat the veggie in a bit of butter and sprinkle cinnamon and sugar over it. Then, wrap the potato in foil to hold in the juices and soften the skin. Once cooked, cut it open and add whatever seasonings you prefer. Salt and paprika are good balances to the sweet exterior.

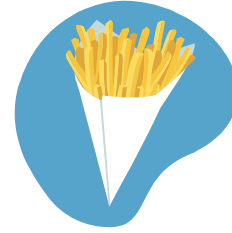
You can also microwave a sweet potato. Wash the sweet potato first. Then puncture it a few times with a fork. Place on paper towel on microwave-safe dish. Cook on high for 4-5 minutes for the first potato, plus 2-3 minutes for each additional potato. Turn over potatoes halfway through cooking.

The following recipes are surely crowd pleasers and can be made any time of the year. Enjoy!



SWEET POTATO FRIES

2 Sweet potatoes- 5" long
2 tbsp Olive oil
1/4 tsp Salt
1/4 tsp Pepper
1/2 tsp Onion powder
1/2 tsp Paprika
dash cayenne, red pepper



Wash potatoes, then chop into pieces the length of the potato and approximately 1/2 inch thick and wide. Place into mixing bowl with the oil and spices. Gently mix with your hand or a utensil. Spread onto 12 x 15 baking pan, minimizing crowding and keeping to 1 layer. Bake for 25-30 minutes at 375-400 degrees. Poke with a fork for doneness. Play with the spices and create your own family favorites!
Serves 2-4 (1/2 to 1 potato per person)

Number of Servings: 4

Nutrition Information per serving: 137 calories, 5g fat, 17g carbohydrates, 1.2g protein, 158mg sodium, 2g fiber

Source: Sparkpeople.com

QUICK BLACK BEAN AND SWEET POTATO CHILI

2 medium-large sweet potatoes
2 TBSP olive oil
1 cup chopped onion
2 to 3 garlic cloves
1 medium red bell pepper diced
32 oz black beans, rinsed & drained

28 oz diced tomatoes
2 tsp ground cumin
1/2 tsp dried oregano
salt to taste
cilantro for garnish



Microwave sweet potatoes on high until just firm, about 3 to 4 min per potato. When cool enough to handle, peel & cut into 3/4 inch dice. Set aside. Heat oil in large soup pot. Add onion & garlic; sauté over medium heat until golden. Add bell pepper, beans, tomatoes, cumin & oregano. Bring to a simmer. Cover & simmer gently for 15 minutes. Add the sweet potatoes and continue to simmer until vegetables are tender, 10 to 15 minutes. Season lightly with salt. If time allows, let stand off heat for 1 to 2 hours, then heat through as needed. Garnish each bowl with cilantro.

Number of Servings: 6

Nutrition Information per serving: 286 calories, 5g fat, 46g carbohydrates, 13g protein, 266mg sodium, 14g fiber

Source: Sparkpeople.com

SWEET POTATO BARS

5 sweet potatoes
4 cups oats
2/3 cup maple syrup
3/4 cup OJ
2 tbsp cinnamon
2 tbsp canola oil

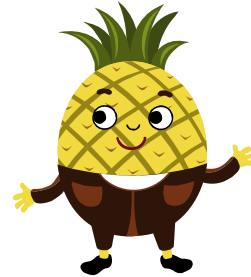
Cook sweet potatoes first. Mix other ingredients (except oats). Peel and mash cooled sweet potatoes. Add cooked sweet potato (without skin). Add oats. Mix. Spread into lightly greased cookie sheet. Bake at 400 for 23 minutes. Cool 10 minutes. Cut into 24 squares.

Number of Servings: 24

Nutrition Information per serving: 160 calories, 3g fat, 29g carbohydrates, 5g protein, 10mg sodium, 4g fiber

FRUITY SWEET POTATO SALAD

8 sweet potatoes
3 cans of mandarin oranges - drained
2 cans of pineapple chunks - 1/4 cup juice reserved
2 mangoes
1 cup seedless grapes
1/2 cup packed brown sugar
1/2 cup miniature marshmallows



Wash sweet potatoes and place in pot to boil until tender. Meanwhile, drain canned fruit in colander. Wash grapes and add into colander. Peel completely cooled sweet potatoes and cut into cubes. Place cubed sweet potatoes into casserole dish. Cut mango into small pieces and place in casserole dish. Fold remaining fruit into casserole dish. Preheat oven to 350°F. Pour reserved pineapple juice into a small pan on low heat. Add brown sugar and stir until sugar is dissolved. Add marshmallows and stir until marshmallows have melted. Let cool 5 minutes then fold into sweet potatoes and fruit. Place casserole dish in oven and let bake for 20 minutes.

Number of Servings: 12

Nutrition information per serving: 205 calories, 0.4g fat, 42g carbohydrates, 9g protein, 21mg sodium, 3g fiber

Source: Adapted from Sparkpeople.com