

## ABOUT SWEET POTATOES

This year we offer five varieties of sweet potatoes. Each bundle of sweet potato slips contains 5 slips of one variety, for \$2.50.

**Beauregard:** Reddish purple skin, bright orange flesh, succulent and tender. Resistant to soil rot, white grubs, cracking. Vining. 95 days.

**Centennial:** Coppery skin, tender, savory, deep orange flesh. Good keeper and wonderful for cooking. Resistant to internal cork, wilt. High yields. Vining. 90-100 days.

**Georgia Jet:** Red skin, sweet, deep orange flesh. Excellent baker, rich aroma. High vitamin A content. Very productive. Vining. 85-100 days.

**Vardaman:** Golden-yellow skin, deep orange flesh; the young foliage is a lovely purple so it's a decorative plant as well. Generous yields of delicious potatoes. Non-vining, compact bush variety, great for small gardens, borders; developed by USDA. 95 days.

**White Yam:** Unusual heirloom sweet potato with tan skin, creamy flesh, very sweet. Vining. 100 days.

### Planting sweet potatoes:

Sweet potatoes are easy to grow, and require little care other than regular watering. The handy thing about vining varieties is that they cover the ground and look beautiful and also suppress weeds and help keep the soil moist. Each sweet potato plant will yield 2-3 pounds of potatoes.

Sweet potatoes need full sun, and warm, well drained soil; work some compost in, but do not apply fresh manure or high nitrogen fertilizers. We suggest inoculating the soil with beneficial microbes, using either compost or fertilizer that contains these helpful creatures. You will find it easier to harvest the potatoes if you plant in a raised or mounded bed, so that you can reach in from the sides to check the size of the tubers. A bed that is a flattened ridge or mound will also have improved drainage. To warm up the soil, cover the sweet potato bed with black plastic (or a plastic hoop house) for a few weeks before you plant. Then you can plant by cutting slits through the black plastic, or you can remove the plastic and mulch the bed with 6 inches of organic material about 2 weeks after you plant.

Keep the slips in a shady spot, with the roots quite damp (you can even put them in a jar of water), until you are ready to plant. You can trim off any slimy or wilted leaves. Set out the slips in warm (60-70°) soil, about 2 weeks after last frost date (here that would be about May 24), or even later. A recent article reports excellent results when sweet potatoes are planted in early July. Try to plant in the evening, to avoid sun-burning the plants their first day, and plant on a warm day. If it is unseasonably cool, wait.

Plant slips 12-15 inches apart, in rows 3-4 feet apart (1 foot apart for bush variety). Plant the slips up to their top leaves – about 6 inches deep – and water thoroughly. Keep the soil very wet for 7-10 days, then water normally. Mound soil or mulch over the row, up to the main stem of the plant, as the plants grow. Vines may spread to 20 feet.

Harvest the main crop when potatoes have reached acceptable size, which will probably be about the time of the first frost in the fall (harvest **immediately** if the vines are injured by the frost, or decay in the vines will work its way down to the potatoes). If you want sweet potatoes earlier (or if you just want to check on the size of the tubers), you can dig into the side of your mounded bed and carefully remove a few tubers - "baby bakers", taking care not to injure the main plant. About 2 weeks before you intend to harvest the main crop of potatoes, stop watering. Be careful when digging the potatoes, as they bruise easily. Brush off dirt, do not wash. Cure indoors in a warm (85°) place, for a week, then store in a cool place (55-60°).

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