

SWEET POTATOES 2024

Sweet potatoes will be available in mid-May in 3.5" pots. Each pot contains 3 slips of one variety. **Items subject to availability.**

Bunch Porto Rican: 100+ days. The skin is yellow to gold. The flesh is cream to orange and is great for baking and cooking. Plants are attractive with purple stems and a compact, bush-type habit.

Georgia Jet: 90 days. Rose colored skin offsets the light orange flesh. Great for baking. High-yielding plants have a vine habit and good hardiness.

O'Henry: 90-95 days. A white sweet potato with good storage and flavor. Vigorous vines are heavy yielding.

Purple Passion: 100 days. A unique variety with purple skin and flesh that provides a nutritional boost and looks great in a medley of roasted vegetables. Plants have a vining habit and moderate drought tolerance.

Red Japanese: 110+ days. Red skin and starchy but sweet, ivory flesh make for a striking vegetable. Vines are vigorous and adaptable.

Vardaman: 100+ days. The skin is light orange, and the dark orange flesh has excellent flavor. The compact, bush-type habit makes this an option for small gardens. High yields.

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, look beautiful, suppress weeds, and help keep the soil moist. Also, they are said to repel squash bugs, so planting a few sweet potatoes with your squashes and pumpkins might be worth a try: one sweet potato per 2-3 squashes or pumpkins, let them vine together. Each sweet potato plant will yield 2-3 pounds.

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 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.

Until you are ready to plant, keep the slips in a shady spot and do not let them dry out. 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 sunburning the plants their first day, and plant on a warm day. If it is unseasonably cool, wait. Alternatively, you can plant earlier if you cover with a cloche, row cover, or hoop house for protection.

Plant slips 12-15 inches apart, in rows 3-4 feet apart (1 foot apart for bush variety). Plant the slips at the same depth as in the pots, or a little deeper, and water thoroughly. Make sure the soil stays damp for the first week, then you can water normally, but don't let the soil get too dry. 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 (about October 1 to October 10, although we have had frost in late September); 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, taking care not to injure the main plant. About 2 weeks before you intend to harvest the main crop, 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°).