

Louisiana Sweet Potatoes 'LOUISIANA YAMS'

Featuring historical and nutritional information, helpful hints and recipes



History

Louisiana sweet potatoes or Louisiana yams, as they have come to be known, are bred to have a soft, moist flesh, to be exceptionally sweet and flavorful and to be very high in beta carotene or vitamin A value.

The successful golden sweet potatoes are the result of extensive research programs conducted by Experiment Station scientists of the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center.

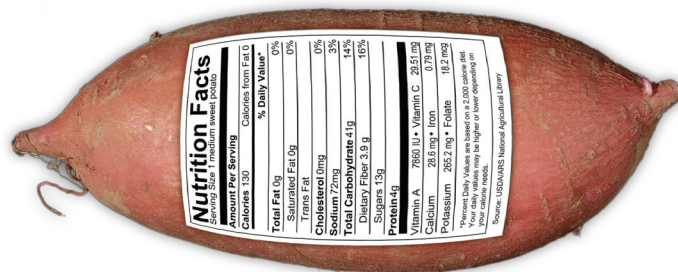
Sweet potatoes have been part of the landscape of Louisiana for more than 200 years, but it was not until 1937 that they began to be marketed nationally as Louisiana yams. Much of the creation of the Louisiana sweet potato industry can be credited to an outstanding scientist, the late Dr. Julian C. Miller, and his colleagues in the horticulture department of Louisiana State University. They chose to call this moist-flesh sweet potato the Louisiana yam to distinguish it from the many other sweet potato varieties grown elsewhere at that time.

Research efforts have continued, and several important sweet potato varieties have been developed through cooperative efforts of scientists and extension personnel of the LSU AgCenter with cooperation from producers and others in the Louisiana sweet potato industry.

The Beauregard variety, which was developed by LSU AgCenter scientists, now accounts for about 90 percent of the sweet potato production in Louisiana. But the Evangeline Sweet Potato variety, which was released by the LSU AgCenter in 2007, also is gaining popularity.

Evangeline has a bright orange flesh and is high in sucrose, which makes it a great tasting sweet potato. The Evangeline variety currently represents about 10 percent of Louisiana's sweet potato acreage, but that number is expected to increase over the next few years.

The economic importance of Louisiana yams is noted by their worldwide distribution. They are marketed not only fresh but also through various processing sectors.



Nutrition

According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service, sweet potatoes often are called a "nutritional powerhouse" because they are very high in beta carotene. The deep orange color of the sweet potatoes indicates it is rich in carotene, which becomes vitamin A inside the body. Vitamin A is needed for normal growth, development, reproduction, a healthy immune system and vision. One medium-size baked sweet potato provides about twice the recommended daily amount of vitamin A.

Sweet potatoes also are a good source of dietary fiber, vitamin B6, potassium and vitamin C when baked in the skin. They are low in sodium, fat and saturated fat. One medium-size baked sweet potato has only 103 calories.

Cured vs. Uncured

Freshly dug sweet potatoes that reach the market in late summer and early fall are uncured. Fresh, uncured potatoes may be available at farmers markets. They are good boiled, mashed, candied, fried and in many cooked dishes, but uncured potatoes do not bake successfully.

Freshly harvested sweet potatoes must be cured before they will bake successfully. During the curing time, the starch is converted to sugar, making the potatoes sweet and moist. Typically, sweet potatoes are cleaned after harvest and then cured and stored until they are ready to be transported to market. Commercially, they are kiln dried. Cured or kiln-dried sweet potatoes usually come to the market in late fall just before Thanksgiving. They are delicious baked or prepared in any manner.

Sweet potatoes may be cured by holding them for about 10 days at 80-85 degrees Fahrenheit with high relative humidity (85-90 percent) and good air circulation. They also may be cured at lower temperatures of 65-75 F for two to three weeks.

Selection

Fresh: When buying fresh sweet potatoes, choose well-shaped, firm potatoes with smooth, bright, uniformly colored skins. Avoid sweet potatoes with holes or cuts that penetrate the skin, since those cause decay.

Value Added

Frozen: Value-added frozen sweet potatoes have become increasingly popular in recent years and are available as fries, slices, halves, patties and puffs. Directions about how to prepare the various frozen forms are on the package labels.

Canned: Canned sweet potatoes are available in several styles – whole, pieces, mashed and with fruit. Whole or cut sweet potatoes are packed in syrup. Some are vacuum packed without syrup, and there are lighter styles that have less sugar. Read the label to choose the style, amount and brand or grade.

Other: Sweet potato chips, biscuit and pancake mixes, juices, cookies, baby foods, prepared casseroles and pet food are among the other ways are used.

Storage: Store cured sweet potatoes in a cool, dry place where the temperature is about 55 to 60 degrees F. Do not store them in the refrigerator or below 55 degrees F. Chilling a sweet potato will give it a hard core and an undesirable taste when cooked. Store canned sweet potatoes in a cool place.

Preparation

Ideally, fresh sweet potatoes should be cooked within a week or two of being purchased, but they may be stored for up to one month. Well matured, carefully handled and properly cured potatoes will

keep for several months if the temperature and storage conditions are ideal. This usually is not possible, however, and potatoes spoil easily. You might wish to cook and freeze them to maintain high quality.

Sweet potatoes can be prepared in dozens of ways – boiled, microwaved, candied, stuffed, fried, mashed or whipped – but are especially popular when baked and served hot with a little margarine or butter. Another South Louisiana favorite is to serve them with gumbo. Sweet potatoes also may be seasoned with sugar and spices or fruits and included in casseroles and pies or served in orange shells. They combine well with meats for main dishes, and they make tasty cakes and pones and nutritious breads, muffins and cookies. They can even be used in soup or made into candy!

Baking: To bake sweet potatoes, scrub and dry well. Rub lightly with oil. Don't wrap in foil for baking. (When wrapped in foil, sweet potatoes are steamed, not baked. That means they will not be syrupy and will not have the sweet, distinctive flavor of uncovered sweet potatoes baked in a conventional oven.) Place on baking sheet. Bake for 15 minutes in oven preheated to 400 degrees F; then reduce temperature to 375 degrees F and bake until soft (about 1½ hours for medium-size potatoes).

Save energy by baking a large pan of sweet potatoes. After baking, wrap individually in foil; then store together in freezer bag or freezer paper in the freezer. Reheat foil-wrapped sweet potatoes in the oven or remove foil and reheat in the microwave.

The nutrition information for one medium baked sweet potato is 103 calories, 23.6 grams carbohydrate, 3.8 grams fiber, 15 grams fat, .03 grams saturated fat, 0 milligrams cholesterol, 41 milligrams sodium, 21,909 IU vitamin A and 22 milligrams vitamin C.

Another baking/freezing

option: Without peeling the potatoes, wash, trim and heat them in oven at 350 F until potatoes are slightly soft. Cool, remove peel and wrap individually in aluminum foil. Place in polyethylene bags and freeze. Complete the baking in an oven at 350 F immediately before serving, leaving the potatoes wrapped in foil.

Microwaving: Sweet potatoes may be cooked, but not baked, in the microwave oven. When cooked in the microwave, they won't have the sweet, syrupy flavor of oven-baked potatoes.



Check your local grocer for sweet potatoes that are individually wrapped for cooking in the microwave.

To microwave, wash sweet potatoes, dry and puncture each a few times with a fork. Place on a paper towel or a microwave-safe dish. Cook on high for 4 to 5 minutes for the first potato, plus 2 to 3 minutes for each additional potato. Turn over potatoes halfway through cooking.

Boiling: To boil sweet potatoes, boil until tender with skins on and drain immediately. Peel and eat, or use in your favorite recipe. Most sweet potato dishes freeze well. Save time and energy by making a sweet potato dish to serve and one to store in the freezer.

Freezing: Choose medium to large sweet potatoes that have been cured for at least one week. Sort according to size and wash. Cook until almost tender in water, in steam, in a pressure cooker or in the oven. Let stand at room temperature until cool. Peel sweet potatoes, cut in halves, slice or mash.

If desired, to prevent darkening, dip whole sweet potatoes or slices for 5 seconds in a solution of 1/2 cup lemon juice to 1 quart water.

To keep mashed sweet potatoes from darkening, mix 2 tablespoons orange or lemon juice with each quart of mashed sweet potatoes.

Pack into containers, leaving 1/2-inch headspace. Seal and freeze.

Ways to add more sweet potatoes to your meals and snacks:

- Pack a baked sweet potato for lunch, topped with vanilla yogurt or cinnamon-flavored applesauce.
- Add peeled chunks to your favorite stew.
- Switch from potato chips to sweet potato chips.
- Peel and cut into strips to eat with your favorite dip.
- Blend into a breakfast smoothie.
- Substitute in recipes calling for white potatoes or apples.

Use Versatile Louisiana Yams in Healthier Meals

Sweet Potato Pie

Serves 8

2 cups mashed cooked or canned sweet potatoes
1 teaspoon allspice
2 tablespoons low-fat margarine
2 eggs, slightly beaten
3/4 cup sugar (if canned in syrup, use 1/2 cup sugar)
1 cup skim milk
2/3 cup evaporated skim milk
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon vanilla
1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1 plain pastry shell
1/2 teaspoon ginger
3 tablespoons chopped pecans, optional

Cook sweet potatoes, or heat canned potatoes in syrup until most of the liquid has evaporated.

Beat potatoes with mixer, if available. Thoroughly mix in margarine, sugar, salt and spices. Add eggs, milk, evaporated milk and vanilla; mix well. Do not scrape beaters; the fibers have matted together on the beater. Pour into 9-inch pastry-lined pie pan (have edges crimped high). Sprinkle pecans on top. Bake in hot oven at 425 degrees F for 10 minutes. Reduce temperature to 350 degrees F and bake 25-30 minutes longer or until firm around edges but still a little soft in center. Center will get firm as pie cools. Especially good with pecans.

Each serving provides: 319 calories, 13.5 grams fat, 3.1 grams saturated fat, 87 milligrams cholesterol, 49.9 grams carbohydrates, 1.3 grams fiber, 296 milligrams sodium, 4,885 IU vitamin A and 9 milligrams vitamin C.

Variation: Place pie mixture in a casserole dish or in orange cups and bake at 350 degrees F. Top with marshmallows and run under broiler.



Fruited Sweet Potato Cups

16 servings

8 oranges

6 medium sweet potatoes (or 2-pound can)

1/2 stick low-fat, no-salt margarine

1/2 cup sugar

1/2 cup orange juice

1 small can crushed pineapple, canned in own juice

1 small bottle maraschino cherries, chopped

1/4 cup cherry juice

1 teaspoon vanilla

1/2 teaspoon almond flavoring

1/4 teaspoon salt

1/4 cup chopped pecans

small marshmallows

Cut oranges in half. Juice, saving part of juice for potatoes. Remove pulp and white membrane by scraping with spoon. Scallop or flute edges with scissors. Bake or boil sweet potatoes, or heat canned sweet potatoes. Remove skins while hot and mash. Add margarine, sugar, orange and cherry juices and beat well. Do not scrape beaters; the fibers have matted together on the beaters. Fold in pineapple and juice, cherries, flavorings, salt and pecans. Fill orange cups with potato mixture. Top each with 5 marshmallows. Put into hot oven or run under broiler to brown marshmallows.

Each serving provides: 135 calories, 4 grams fat, 0.2 grams saturated fat, 0 milligrams cholesterol, 24.8 grams carbohydrates, 2.1 grams fiber, 1,346 IU vitamin A and 24 milligrams vitamin C.

Note: Orange shells may be prepared ahead and stored in refrigerator in plastic bag. Potato mixture may be prepared ahead or even frozen. Reheat; then fill orange cups.

Sweet Potato-Apple Bisque with Sage Cream

(Best of Show Sweet Potatofest, Winnsboro, 1995)

12 servings

2 tablespoons light margarine

2 cups chopped onions

2 teaspoons minced garlic

3 large sweet potatoes, peeled and cut into chunks

4 large apples, peeled and sliced

4 cups fat-free, reduced-sodium chicken broth

1 tablespoon sage

1/4 teaspoon pepper

Cook onions and garlic in margarine over medium heat until onions are yellow (about 5 minutes). Add potatoes and apples. Cook about 3 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add broth and seasonings. Bring to a boil. Cover and simmer on low heat for about 30 minutes. Puree mixture in blender or food processor. Serve hot with a dollop of sage cream (recipe follows).

Each serving provides: 108 calories, 3.5 grams fat, 0.2 grams saturated fat, 0 milligrams cholesterol, 17 grams carbohydrate, 341 milligrams sodium, 10,875 IU vitamin A and 18 milligrams vitamin C.

Sage Cream

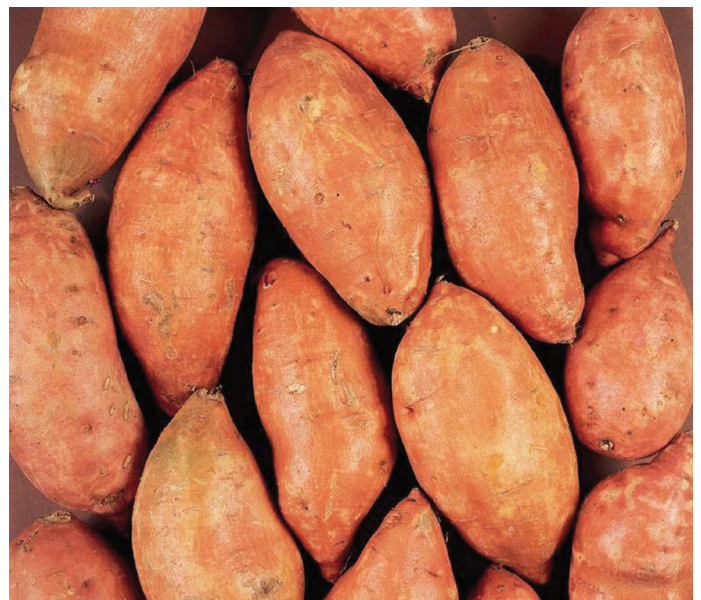
1/2 cup sour cream (low-fat)

1 teaspoon sage

1 tablespoon apple juice

1/4 teaspoon each salt and pepper

Mix and drizzle over hot soup.



Fat-Free Sweet Potato Muffins

Makes about 18 muffins

2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 cup sugar
1/3 cup light brown sugar
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 teaspoon ginger
1 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon baking powder
1/2 teaspoon baking soda
1 1/2 cups shredded sweet potatoes
1/2 cup raisins
1 8-ounce carton nonfat vanilla yogurt
1/2 cup nonfat egg substitute
1 teaspoon vanilla
1 teaspoon confectioners' sugar (dust on top after baking)

Sift dry ingredients. Fold in grated sweet potatoes and raisins. Mix yogurt, egg substitute and vanilla. Mix lightly with dry ingredients. Spray muffin tins with no-stick cooking spray and fill two-thirds full of batter. Bake at 400 degrees F for about 20 minutes or until done. Makes about 18 muffins. As an alternative, bake in loaf pan (4 1/2 inches by 8 1/2 inches) about 50 minutes at 350 degrees F.

Each muffin provides: 146 calories, 32 grams of carbohydrates, 0.5 grams fiber, 0 milligrams fat, 0 milligrams saturated fat, 0 milligrams cholesterol, 288 milligrams sodium, 2,216 IU vitamin A and 2 milligrams vitamin C.



Beauregard Sweet Potatoes

Betty Bagent's Candied Sweet Potatoes

Yield: 18 pieces

6 medium sweet potatoes
1 1/2 cups sugar
1 1/2 teaspoons cinnamon
1 1/2 tablespoons flour
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 stick reduced fat margarine
1 lemon, sliced
1/3 cup water
1/2 cup chopped pecans (optional)

Wash potatoes. Peel and cut into circular slices about 2 inches long — about three slices per potato. Precook in a little water until barely tender. (Or cover whole unpeeled potatoes with water and parboil until barely fork tender — about 15 to 20 minutes. Cool, peel and cut into 2-inch pieces.) Arrange pieces in a greased baking dish about 13 inches by 9 inches.

Mix sugar, cinnamon, flour and salt. Sprinkle evenly over potatoes. Dot with margarine. Twist lemon slices over potatoes; then arrange lemon peels diagonally across potatoes. Pour water evenly over potatoes. Add chopped pecans, if desired. Bake in 400 degrees F oven until syrup is thick (about 35 to 45 minutes). Baste occasionally with the syrup during baking.

Each piece (without nuts) provides: 148 calories, 15 grams carbohydrate, 0.7 grams fiber, 2.5 grams fat, 0 milligrams saturated fat, 0 milligrams cholesterol, 103 milligrams sodium, 10,176 IU vitamin A and 16 milligrams vitamin C.



Bonita Sweet Potatoes

Stuffed Sweet Potatoes

Yields: 8 stuffed potato halves

4 medium sweet potatoes, washed
2 ounces of fresh orange juice
3 teaspoons of margarine, melted
1 tablespoon brown sugar
1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
2 tablespoons chopped pecans

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. With a fork, prick holes in sweet potatoes. Then bake for 45-60 minutes or until tender. Remove from oven and cool slightly for better handling. Once cooled, slice each potato in half diagonally. Scoop out most of the potato, leaving approximately 1/4 inch around the skin. Put potatoes in mixing bowl with orange juice, brown sugar, 2 teaspoons margarine and nutmeg. Whip until smooth. Place potato skins into a 13-inch-by-9-inch baking pan and fill with potato mixture. Set aside. In nonstick frying pan, add remaining margarine (1 teaspoon) and sauté pecans until toasted. Sprinkle potatoes evenly with pecans. Bake an additional 15 to 20 minutes until thoroughly heated.

One serving provides: 86 calories, 2.7 grams fat, 0.4 grams saturated fat, 0 milligrams cholesterol, 10.2 grams fiber, 1.4 grams protein, 14.6 grams carbohydrate, 33 milligrams sodium, 11,090 IU vitamin A and 14.7 milligrams vitamin C.

Sweet Potato Bread

Makes 36 quarter-inch slices

2 cups sugar
1/2 cup cooking oil
1 cup egg substitute
3 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1 1/2 teaspoons baking soda
1/2 teaspoon salt
1 teaspoon cinnamon
1 teaspoon nutmeg
2/3 cup water
2 cups fresh sweet potatoes, cooked and mashed,
or 2 (15-ounce) cans sweet potatoes, drained and
mashed
1/2 cup chopped pecans (optional)

Combine sugar and oil; beat well. Add egg substitute, and beat. Combine dry ingredients and add to egg mixture alternately with water. Stir in sweet potatoes and chopped pecans. Pour into three greased 9-inch-by-5-inch loaf pans. Bake at 350 degrees F for about one hour. Will freeze well.

One serving without pecans provides: 133 calories, 3.45 grams fat, 0 milligrams saturated fat, 23.7 grams carbohydrate, 0 milligrams cholesterol, 5 grams fiber, 925 IU vitamin A and 2 milligrams vitamin C.



Evangeline Sweet Potatoes



Murasaki Sweet Potatoes

Sweet Potato Black Bean Salad with Chili Dressing

Yield: 6 servings

2 large or 3 medium sweet potatoes, chopped into 1-inch pieces

1 medium red onion, chopped

3 teaspoons plus 1 tablespoon olive oil

1 jalapeno chili, cut in half and seeded

1 teaspoon minced garlic from the jar or 1 clove garlic (peeled)

2 limes, juiced

1 can black beans (15-ounce)

1 medium red or yellow bell pepper, seeded and finely diced

1 cup chopped fresh cilantro

Wash sweet potatoes. Do not peel. Cut into 1-inch pieces. Put potatoes into microwave-safe dish, mix with 2 teaspoons olive oil, cover and cook until tender, about 5 minutes. Potatoes will continue to cook outside of microwave.

Put onions in microwave-safe dish with cover. Mix with 1 teaspoon olive oil. Do NOT add water. Microwave for 2 minutes.

Put chilies in a blender or food processor with garlic, lime juice, remaining 1 tablespoon olive oil and a sprinkle of salt and pepper. Process until blended.

Put warm vegetables in a large bowl with beans and bell pepper. Toss with dressing and cilantro. Taste and adjust seasoning, if necessary. Serve warm or at room temperature – or refrigerate for up to one day.

Each serving provides: 223 calories, 34.7 grams carbohydrate, 10.2 grams fiber, 6.6 grams fat, 0.9 grams saturated fat, 0 milligrams cholesterol, 297 milligrams sodium, 12,352 IU vitamin A and 43.5 milligrams vitamin C.



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Sweet Potato Facts We Bet You Didn't Know

- The sweet potato is the basis of one of Louisiana's important agricultural industries.
- The farm value of sweet potatoes exceeds \$50 million, which, in turn, generates over \$100 million for the state's economy.
- About 15,000 acres of sweet potatoes are grown in the state.
- Louisiana supplies about 20 percent of all the sweet potatoes consumed annually in the United States.
- The major sweet potato-producing parishes are Franklin, West Carroll, Avoyelles, Acadia, Morehouse, Richland, St. Landry, Evangeline and Rapides.
- There are two sweet potato processors and about 20 fresh-market shippers in the state.
- About 50 percent of the Louisiana sweet potato crop is processed, and 50 percent goes to the fresh market.
- Beauregard and Evangeline are the predominant varieties grown in Louisiana and are excellent varieties for both the fresh market and processing sectors.
- A rigid quality-control program and grading system have created trade confidence in Louisiana's sweet potatoes. Louisiana's high-quality sweet potatoes bring premium prices over those from other states in nearly all markets throughout the United States.

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Reference: Pub 1843 by
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