

I National Sweet Potato Month

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. Check these links for more ideas for cooking with sweet potatoes.

1543 DeSoto's Spanish explorers found SweetPotatoes growing in "Indian gardens" in what became Louisiana. The SweetPotatoes were also cultivated in the Carolina area of North America before the European colonization.

In Colonial days SweetPotatoes were an item of trade and were shipped from the Carolinas to out 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 generation of our ancestors. During the trying times of the Revolutionary and Civil Wars it was a staple food.

A Colonial physician recommended SweetPotatoes especially for children because of the SweetPotatoes' 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 SweetPotatoes and other foods.

Most large plantations had a SweetPotato-lot. In this fenced enclosure several mounds or hills of potatoes were piled in heaps and covered with the straw and soil, they were protected from the cold and frost of winter. The potatoes became sweet and tasty under the curing mounds or "tater hill."

In the days prior to and during the Civil War the SweetPotato was cut into chunks and planted in the early warm summer soil. This culture practice was similar to planting the Irish potato today. In more recent history SweetPotato slips or plants were hand pegged into a prepared ridge.

During times of shortages in the Southland, while the war between the states raged, the SweetPotato became one of many substitutes for coffee. The potato was cut into thin pieces dried, parched, ground and brewed.

In former days the SweetPotato patch was abundant in North Carolina, and was a familiar sight on most every farm from the Colonial days until the time of World War II. The SweetPotato ranked second only to the Irish potato among vegetable crops in the United States in the early days of this century.

Pleasant childhood memories include a potato hill that children could crawl into and hide, In the mind's eye one can still see granny carefully stooping to select an apron full of baking potatoes for the next days' meal.

Just plain baking the SweetPotato is second to no other method of preparation. By-gone generations of school children and field hands alike packed the dinner bucket with links of sausage and baked SweetPotatoes.

At the Sampson County estate sale of Thomas B. Hare in July of 1884, Lovett Lockamy purchased the SweetPotato patch for \$6.25. At the same sale, William Page bid \$6.60 for a sow and five pigs.

The SweetPotato was the snack food of our grandparents. Children would whine, “I’m hungry,” only to be told, “Take an old cold tater and wait.” Country music singer, Little Jimmy Dickens, reflected this nostalgic emotion of this generation with the song, “Take an Old Cold Tater and Wait.”

Who among us remembers sopping cracklings with a cold SweetPotato? Better yet, who knows what cracklings are?

The SweetPotato became associated with hard times in the minds of our ancestors and when they became affluent enough to change their menu, the potato was served less often.

Surprisingly, in the botanical family, the morning glory and the SweetPotato are sisters. One can see similarities when looking at a SweetPotato patch with its tangle of vines and occasional flowers. Generations have enjoyed the beauty of the blossom’ sparkle under the beads of early morning dew.

In spite of all the nostalgia and history on the side of the nutritious SweetPotato, it has ever so slowly lost it’s prominent position on the dinner tables of North America. The per capita consumption of SweetPotatoes in the Unites States was 31 pounds in 1920; in recent years it dipped below four pounds per capita.

The sweet tater patch has given way to large SweetPotato fields, while the tater hill has lost out to modern potato storage houses. The smell of sweet taters baking in a wood burning stove is but a fading memory.

The Confusion Between SweetPotatoes and Yams

What’s in a name? When it comes to the yam, a bit of confusion. What is marketed in the United States as “yams” are really a variety of SweetPotato, grown in the South. A true yam is a starchy edible root of the Dioscorea genus, and is generally imported to America from the Caribbean. It is rough and scaly and very low in beta carotene.

“Yams,” as the industry and general public perceives them, are actually Sweet Potatoes with a vivid orange color and a soft moist consistency when cooked, and tend to have a sweeter flavor. Other varieties of Sweet Potatoes are lighter skinned and have a firmer, drier texture when cooked. Sweet Potatoes are smooth with skins that can vary in color, depending on the variety, from pale yellow to deep purple to vivid orange. Flesh colors can range from light yellow to pink, red or orange.

So where did all of the confusion come from? Several decades ago when orange flesh Sweet Potatoes were introduced into the southern United States, producers and shippers desired to distinguish them from the more traditional white flesh types. The African word "nyami" referring to the starchy, edible root of the Dioscorea genus of plants was adopted in its English form, "yam".

Yams in the United States are actually SweetPotatoes with relatively moist texture and orange flesh. Although the terms are generally used interchangeably, the US Department of Agriculture requires that the label "yam" always be accompanied by "Sweet Potato."

The following information outlines several differences between Sweet Potatoes and yams

by pla 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.

The National Cancer Institute recommends that people eat at least five servings of fruit and vegetables a day, especially vegetables that are rich in vitamins A and C (like sweet potatoes).

Vegetables and fruits contain more than 100 beneficial vitamins, minerals, fibers and other substances, including phytochemicals (chemical compounds such as carotenoids, flavonoids, terpenes, sterols, indoles and phenols, created by plants).

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Sweet Potato Salsa

Ingredients

- 2 medium sweet potatoes, peeled and chopped into 1/2 inch pieces**
- 1/4 cup olive oil**
- 1 tablespoon balsamic or red wine vinegar**
- 1 teaspoon chili powder**
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cumin**
- 1 tomato, cored and chopped**
- 1 red bell pepper, cored, seeded and chopped into 1/4-inch dice (about 1 cup)**
- 2 jalapeños, seeded and diced**
- 2 scallions, minced (green and white part)**
- 2 tablespoons fresh chopped cilantro**
- Juice and zest of 1 large lime (about 2 tablespoons)**
- Salt and freshly ground pepper to taste**

Preparation

- **Preheat the oven to 400°F. In a medium bowl, toss the sweet potatoes (and tomato cut in half if roasting*) with the olive oil, vinegar, chili powder and cumin and spread in one layer on a large rimmed baking pan. Place in the oven and roast for 30 to 35 minutes, stirring a couple of times, until the potatoes are golden brown and soft. Remove from the oven and set aside to cool.**
- **In a medium bowl, place the tomato, red pepper, jalapeño, scallion, cilantro and lime juice and zest with the sweet potatoes; toss until combined. Season with salt and pepper and serve warm with eggs, tostadas, grilled steak or chicken.**

Makes approximately 3 1/4 cups

***Tip: If tomatoes are not in season roast with the sweet potatoes for a better flavor.**

Butter Nut-Sweet Potato Soup

2 1/2 pounds roasted butter nut squash
2 1/2 pounds roasted sweet potatoes
2 cups diced onions
1 1/2 gal chicken stock
1/4 cup molasses
1/4 cup honey
kosher salt and white pepper to taste

Take fine julienne green onion slice and red bell pepper slice and place in ice water. Both green onion and red pepper will curl. Place in center of soup as garnish.

Roast the butter nut squash with skin on in 350° oven till tender. Cut the squash in half & take seeds out. After roasting, let cool till room temp. Then, remove all skin. Sweat onions with 1 tablespoon olive oil. When onions are translucent add sweet potatoes and butter nut squash and cook over medium heat for 5-7 minutes. Then add 1 1/2 gallons of chicken stock. Bring to a boil, then reduce heat to a simmer. Cook for about 30 minutes. Then puree and place soup back in pot and add 1/4 cup honey and 1/4 cup molasses. Let cook for another 15-20 minutes, adjusting with kosher salt and pepper to taste - soup should coat spoon. Garnish with 1 pound crawfish tails. Ladle soup in bowl, then in center place green onion-red pepper salad.

Sweet Potato Muffins

3/4 cup oat bran
3/4 cup whole wheat flour
2/3 cup sugar
1 1/2 tsp. cinnamon
1 tsp. baking powder

1 tsp. baking soda
1/8 tsp. salt
1/2 cup apples, skinless, finely chopped
1 cup fresh sweet potatoes (yams), cooked and mashed or 1 (15 oz.) can sweet potatoes,
drained and mashed
1 large egg
2 large egg whites
3 tbsp. vegetable oil
2/3 cup plain yogurt

Preheat oven to 350 degrees. In a bowl, combine bran, flour, sugar, cinnamon, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and apples. Add sweet potatoes, egg, egg whites, oil, and yogurt. Stir all ingredients thoroughly. Spray muffin tins with vegetable cooking spray and spoon 1/4 cup of batter per muffin. Makes approximately 20 muffins.

Per serving: CAL 98 (24% from fat); FAT 3g; PROTEIN 4g; CARB 18g; CHOL 11mg;
SODIUM 119mg

Variation: Add 1 cup of raisins.
