

Sweet Potatoes

One of the few vegetables that thrive in hot weather, sweet potatoes keep growing until the first frost. The attractive vines will run all over the garden. There are two types: those with soft, sugary, orange flesh and those with firm, dry, whitish flesh. If you have a small space, choose a compacted variety.

Planting and Care:

Plant your sweet potatoes in a sunny spot, with loose, well drained soil. Buy certified disease-free slips (rooted cuttings). Plant them in spring when the soil has warmed to 70 degrees. Set them out 10 to 18 inches apart, on rows mounded 10 inches high and 12 inches wide, spaced 3 to 4 feet apart. Keep the soil moist until the plants are established. In cool-summer areas, you can increase the heat around the plants with plastic mulches.

Once the plants are established, water regularly, but allow the soil to dry slightly between watering. Do not fertilize (too much nitrogen reduces yield and lowers quality). Let the vines sprawl. Watch for aphids, flea beetles, leaf hoppers, nematodes and wire worms.

Harvest:

From 110 to 120 days after planting, before the first frost. Dig potatoes up carefully and dry them in the sun. After curing, store them in a cool, damp place (not below 55 degrees). Yields are from 8 to 12 pounds per 10-foot row.

Tip:

Uncured sweet potatoes taste musty. To cure them, after harvest, put them in a warm (about 85 degrees), humid place for several weeks. Then store them to improve the flavor.



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