

SWEET POTATO

Educator | VermontHarvestoftheMonth.org

History

Native to Central America, the sweet potato is not related to potatoes but instead is in the same family as morning glory. Remains of sweet potatoes were discovered in a cave in Peru, showing that they have been consumed since prehistoric times. This crop was an important dietary staple for early American homesteaders and for soldiers during the Civil War. Sweet potatoes are very popular in the southern United States and have been grown in that region since the 16th century. Although often mistaken for the yam, sweet potatoes are more flavorful and less starchy than yams.

Reading Corner

- » *Little Sweet Potato* by Amy Beth Bloom
- » *Sweet Potato Pie* by Kathleen Lindsey

Fun Facts

- Sweet potatoes contain an enzyme which converts many of its starches to sugar as it matures
- There are over 300 varieties of sweet potato, with flesh ranging from white to deep orange
- In Eastern medicine, this vegetable is highly regarded for its tonifying and nourishing abilities
- Sweet potatoes and yam are two different crops- yams can grow much larger than sweet potatoes and are native to Africa and Asia

Benefits

Sweet potatoes are high in vitamins A and C. They also provide fiber and potassium.



Harvest of the Month provides resources for the cafeteria, classroom, and community to promote the use of local, seasonal foods.

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Science | Sweet Potato Propagation

Supplies needed:
Sweet potato, knife, toothpicks, clean jar



Directions:

- Sweet potatoes are grown from slips or vine cuttings-not seeds.
- Cut a clean, non-bruised sweet potato in half. Place each portion of sweet potato in jar of water with half of the potato submerged and half above the water. Use toothpicks to hold in place.
- Keep in a warm location for a few weeks and slips will begin to grow.

History | George Washington Carver & the Sweet Potato

Supplies needed:
"In the Garden with Dr. Carver" by Susan Grigsby, sweet potato, paint brushes, paper

Directions:

- George Washington Carver was an important American scientist. Although many people think about him as someone who worked with peanuts, he also came up with over 100 uses for sweet potatoes!
- Read the story and discuss Carver and his experiments around agriculture-why were they important? What was the most surprising thing you heard?
- One of Carver's uses of sweet potato was paint. Cook and puree sweet potato, thinning with water to create a paint-like consistency. Allow students to experiment with this new medium!