Sweet Potato Growing Guide

Plant slips out immediately after arrival and when the soil has warmed to 60–65°F/16–18°C. If planting must be delayed, wrap the root end in moist paper towels, keeping leaves and stems dry; place upright and keep at room temperature, out of direct sunlight and wind. If planting must be delayed by a week or more, loosely plant the slips in sterile potting soil and keep soil moist; keep indoors or in a greenhouse. Gently lift out and separate slips when ready to plant. Sweet potatoes are a tropical vine that produces moist, sweet, storage roots. Although some may refer to them as yams, sweet potatoes are neither potatoes nor yams. Being tropical in nature they do require an ample amount of heat over a long season (at least 4 frost-free months) to produce a marketable crop.

SOIL REQUIREMENTS: Sweet potatoes grow best in well-drained, sandy loam soils with a pH of about 6.5. High fertility is not required, but a loose sandy soil produces more uniform roots. Planting in raised beds will help with soil warming, drainage, and root development. Many northern growers have found using black plastic mulch to be an effective growing practice. Form beds and cover beds with mulch 2–3 weeks before of anticipated planting date to sufficiently warm the soil.

PLANTING: Plant slips 3–4 inches deep, leaves above soil, 10–18 inches apart (a wider spacing produces larger potatoes) in rows 36–60 inches apart. The most common spacing is 12 inches apart in rows 36–42 inches apart. Keep young plants weed free with shallow cultivation or mulching. Once the sweet potato plants are actively growing, they will smother out most weeds with a proliferation of runners. Do not trim or cut off the runners — they act as secondary roots, pulling water and nutrients from the soil. If growing in northern climates, applying row cover for the first several weeks after planting, and again in the fall before harvest, may extend the season by creating a warmer growing environment.

INSECT PESTS AND DISEASES: Sweet potatoes generally have few insect pests. Control may be necessary for flea beetles, Japanese beetles, sweet potato leaf beetles, and wireworms. Row covers will prevent beetles from feeding on young plants. Wireworm damage is best prevented by avoiding fields that were grass in the previous year. Sweet potato weevils may be a problem in the southern United States, and can be prevented with crop rotation and removal of crop residue. Avoid diseases, such as scurf, with crop rotation and by removing all plant debris after harvest.

HARVEST: Dig roots in fall before any hard frosts and before soil temperatures drop to 50°F/10°C. If plants get frosted, harvest roots as soon as possible – frost damage will travel from the plants and affect the roots. Cut back vines by hand or with a mower, and then dig roots by hand with a spading fork or mechanically with a bed lifter. Handle carefully to avoid injuring the skins. STORAGE: Sweet potatoes must be cured before storing to toughen skins and improve eating quality. Brush loose soil from the roots and cure in a warm, 85°F/29°C, dark, well-ventilated place with 85% relative humidity for 4-7 days. After curing, store in a cool, 60°F/16°C, dark place and avoid any unnecessary handling. Do not allow the storage temperature to drop below 50°F/10°C, as this will chill and injure the roots. Once cured, continuing to store the roots for an additional 3–4 weeks before eating allows for better sugar content. Properly handled roots can be stored for 7 months or more.

NORTH END
ORGANIC NURSERY

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Garnet Sweet Potato

Red colored skin with moist orange flesh.

For best yields, we recommend 10" Spacing, +/- 13,500 slips per acre. Mostly medium-sized tubers, but can grow up to one foot long.

Excellent flavor. Best used in recipes that call for mashed or grated sweet potatoes such as pies, cakes and breads. The soft flesh also makes excellent mashed sweet potatoes. Also known as Red Yam.

Days to Maturity: 90- 110 days