

NEWS ARTICLE

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SWEET POTATOES – A FALL FAVORITE

November is sweet potato awareness month! Baked sweet potatoes, candied sweet potatoes, mashed sweet potatoes, sweet potato pie; the options are endless for enjoying this fall favorite.

While people may think that the names sweet potato and yams are the same, they are not. Yams grow underground from a vine and can look similar to a sweet potato. Often yams look more cylindrical with thick skin, have toes sprouting from them and can get as large as 7 feet long and 150 pounds! Sweet potatoes grow on trailing vines that quickly cover the soil and root at the nodes. Sweet potatoes have a thin skin.

When choosing sweet potatoes to cook, choose ones that are firm, small to medium in size with a smooth skin and uniform color. Avoid potatoes with cracks, soft spots or blemishes in the skin. Store them in a cool, dark, dry place to be used within two to four weeks. Avoid storing sweet potatoes in the refrigerator because it will result in a hard center and unpleasant taste.

Sweet potatoes are a delicious addition to any meal. You can enjoy them baked, broiled, grilled, roasted, or boiled and mashed. You can eat sweet potatoes as fries, chips, or cube them for stews and soups.

To prepare sweet potatoes, always wash them first even if they look clean. Bake them by piercing the skin several times with a fork and placing them in the oven at 400 degrees for 15 minutes then reduce the temperature to 375 degrees and bake until fork tender. You may want to bake them on a foil lined pan or wrap them in foil as you would white baking potatoes.

You can microwave bake sweet potatoes by piercing them with a fork several times and placing them in the microwave. Bake them on high for 5-8 minutes. Check halfway through the cook time and rotate the potatoes. Baking the sweet potato gives it more of the sweet, syrupy flavor although it does not change the nutrient content of the potato.

Sweet potato fries are becoming popular and they are easy to make. Slice the washed potato into lengthwise quarters. Preheat the oven to 400 degrees. Drizzle the sweet potatoes with olive oil, garlic powder, and black pepper to taste. Try adding a dash of cayenne pepper to make them spicy. Place sweet potato fries evenly on a pan lined with foil and bake for 40-60 minutes.

Sweet potatoes are loaded in nutrients and are naturally fat-free, low in sodium, and cholesterol free. They are high in vitamins A and C. Vitamin A helps maintain eye health and Vitamin C helps to fight infections. Sweet potatoes may also help to reduce your risk of heart disease and certain cancers. Sweet potatoes are also a good source of potassium, magnesium, and fiber. Potassium helps maintain healthy blood pressure, magnesium helps build and maintain strong bones, and fiber helps control cholesterol and keeps you regular.

When eating sweet potatoes, try to keep sugar and butter to a minimum. Both of these additions add unwanted calories and fat. A medium sized sweet potato, 2 inches in diameter and 5 inches long, has about 100 calories with 24 g carbohydrate, and 3.8 g dietary fiber.

Plan on enjoying sweet potatoes in many of your fall meals. For more information on meal planning, nutrition, food safety, health, physical activity, finances or family well-being, contact the Howard County Extension Office at 870-845-7517 or visit our office located on the second floor of the courthouse.

Recipe of the Week

Here is a holiday favorite for Thanksgiving. This recipe is lower in calories, but still tastes great.

Sweet Potato Casserole

1-pound sweet potatoes (about 4 medium)

3 egg whites

½ cup sugar

1 can (12 oz.) nonfat evaporated milk

1 Tablespoon vanilla extract

1 teaspoon cinnamon

½ teaspoon nutmeg

½ teaspoon ginger

Rinse sweet potatoes in cold running water and pierce with a fork. Microwave sweet potatoes on full power until tender, about 15 minutes. Turn them halfway during baking.

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Remove skin from sweet potatoes and mash with a hand mixer. Add the rest of the ingredients and mix until smooth.

Pour mixture in an 8-inch square baking pan. Bake until casserole is firm in the center, about 40 minutes. Remove pan from oven. Allow to stand for 5 minutes then cut into 10 squares. Serve hot. Refrigerate leftovers.

Yield: 10 servings

*Note: You may use canned sweet potatoes instead of raw potatoes.

Nutrition Information per Serving: Calories-110, Total Fat-0 g, Protein-4 g, Carbohydrates -24 g, Fiber-2 g, Sodium-80 mg

