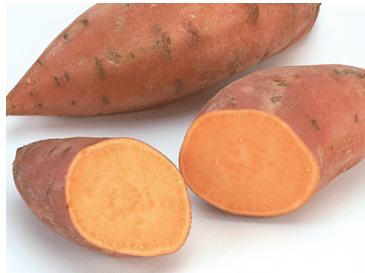
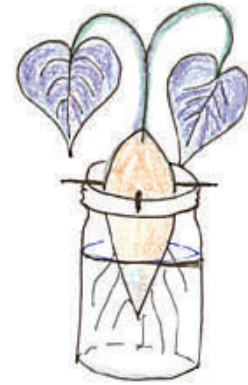


Sweet Potatoes

Ipomea batatas



Sweet potatoes may have originated in Peru. This potato is really the thickened root of a trailing tropical vine similar to our morning glory. The local tribes, finding the vine had wide edible roots, took to growing it in their garden. Through selective planting, eventually the roots became as large as potatoes. These roots had the Indian name batatas.



The sweet potato became a basic food in Central and South America, Mexico, and the West Indies.

It is possible that Peruvian sailors, driven off course by the wind, bought plants to tropical areas of the New World. Christopher Columbus wrote that several types of sweet potatoes were served as food after his ships docked in St. Thomas. He also wrote about sweet potato bread, or aje bread. Columbus carried sweet potatoes to Spain. From there they were brought to Portugal, then to England, where at first they were called Spanish potatoes. Sweet potatoes were also called potatoes. Because of this word mix-up, it is very difficult to trace the history of the sweet potato. It wasn't until 1775 that the sweet potato was actually given its own name in the dictionary. The history of the sweet potato in America is vague. Native American Indians grew sweet potatoes. There is a record of sweet potatoes arriving by ship from Bermuda in 1621. Virginia planters had also started growing them by 1650. In the United States today, sweet potatoes are most widely grown in southern states. However, China currently is the main sweet potato growing country. Sweet potatoes have a lot of vitamin A, plus vitamins C and B, potassium, calcium, and phosphorus. Not many people confuse a sweet potato with a white potato today. But sweet potatoes are often confused with yams, a native of West Africa. True yams are very seldom seen in the super market. But you will see sweet potatoes with moist deep orange insides that are called yams.

Sweet Potato Fries

- 1/2 tsp. cumin
 - 1/2 tsp. salt
 - 1/4 tsp. ground red pepper
 - 1 T. vegetable oil
 - 2 large sweet potatoes
1. Prepare the sweet potatoes: In a small bowl, combine cumin, salt, and pepper. Set aside. Preheat oven to 400 degrees F. Peel potatoes, cut each in half lengthwise, and cut each half into 6 wedges. In a large bowl, combine the cut potatoes, oil, and spice mixture. Toss until potatoes are evenly coated.
 2. Bake the fries: On a baking sheet, arrange potatoes in a single layer and place on the middle shelf of the oven. Bake until edges are crisp and potatoes are cooked through -- about 30 minutes. Serve immediately.

WHAT YOU NEED

- *3 sweet potatoes* Sweet potatoes should be very easy to grow. Many sold in supermarkets have been specifically treated to not sprout. Try to find those with little purple bumps on the skin, or a few skinny white roots sticking out. Using 3 sweet potatoes gives you a better chance of success.
- *3 clean jars* Large jam jars or medium-size peanut butter jars are the right size.
- *about 20 toothpicks*
- *water*

WHAT TO DO

Find the pointed or narrower end of each sweet potato. Sometimes this end has a little 'tail.' This is the end that goes into the water.

Put 1 sweet potato in each jar. It should not touch the jar bottom. To hold it up, put 3 or 4 toothpicks around the middle like a belt. Put water in the jar until it comes halfway up the sweet potato.

Place the jar in a warm, shady place in your room or kitchen. Make certain the water stays at the halfway mark. Change the water once a week. Use warmish water, never cold. If the potato water ever starts to smell, despite changing it weekly, that sweet potato may have been treated not to grow. Instead, it is spoiling. Throw it out and start again.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN?

Within two weeks, you should see white roots from the bottom of a growing sweet potato.

About two to three weeks later, you should see stems. Move the plant to a bright window.

Soon many ivylike leaves will grow. These become very pretty long stems or vines that will grow for two months or more. Keep adding water to the halfway mark so the roots don't dry out.

When your vines get long, you can use them to start new vines. Cut off 1 to 5 pieces of vine. Each should be about 6 inches long. Place these in a jam-size jar or mayonnaise-size jar filled with water. In a few days you will see roots. Then you will have more vines.

Add fresh water as the water evaporates. If you decorate the jars, you have nice presents for your family.

This article brought to you by '[Gardening Wizardry for Kids](#)' by L. Patricia Kite