

Sweet Potato Basics

SELECTION & STORAGE

- Look for firm, well-shaped sweet potatoes with clean, smooth skins. Avoid any with soft spots or bruises. Do not refrigerate, because cold temperatures are harmful to sweet potatoes.
- Store them in a dry, well-ventilated place.
- To cure sweet potatoes: store the fresh potatoes in a warm room in the house for 14 days. Curing develops the flavor and allows for longer storage.

COOKING SWEET POTATOES

- For baking, prick the skin and bake at 400 °F for 40 to 50 minutes until done.
- For boiling, place whole sweet potatoes in boiling water and cook 35 to 45 minutes, depending on their size.
- When cooking in the microwave, prick the skin and microwave on high power. One 8-ounce sweet potato will cook in 4 to 6 minutes.

FREEZING SWEET POTATOES

Wash sweet potatoes that have been cured for at least one week. Cook until almost tender in water, steam, a pressure cooker or the oven. Let stand at room temperature until cool. Peel sweet potatoes; cut in halves; slice or mash.

To prevent darkening, dip whole sweet potatoes or slices for 5 seconds in a solution of ½ cup lemon juice to 1 quart water. To keep mashed sweet potatoes from darkening, mix 2 tablespoons orange or lemon juice with each quart of mashed sweet potatoes. Pack into containers, leaving ½ headspace. Seal and freeze.

CANNING SWEET POTATOES

An average of 11 pounds is needed per canner load of 9 pints. Wash medium potatoes and boil until partially soft for 15 to 20 minutes. Cool only enough to handle and remove skins. Cut potatoes, if needed, so pieces are uniform in size.

CAUTION: Do not mash or puree pieces.

Fill hot jars, leaving 1-inch headspace. Add 1 teaspoon salt per quart jar, if desired. Cover with your choice of fresh boiling water or syrup (use 1 cup sugar per quart of water for a light syrup). Leave 1-inch headspace. Wipe jar rims and adjust lids. At altitudes up to 1,000 feet, process at 11 pounds pressure in a dial-gauge pressure canner or at 10 pounds pressure in a weighted-gauge canner: pints for 65 minutes, quarts for 90 minutes.

SWEET POTATO PIE

Makes one 9-inch pie
Cook 2 pounds of fresh sweet potatoes (about 3 or 4 medium) by baking or boiling. When cool enough to handle, peel the sweet potatoes, or scoop out the flesh, and puree in a food processor with 2 tablespoons melted butter or margarine.

In a mixing bowl, combine ¾ cup sugar, ¼ teaspoon salt, 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon, ¾ teaspoon ground ginger, ¼ teaspoon ground cloves and ½ teaspoon grated lemon peel. Add the sweet potato mixture and mix well. Beat in 3 eggs. Stir in 12 ounces skimmed, evaporated milk and mix until well-blended. Pour the mixture into a 9-inch pastry shell. Bake in a preheated 400 °F. oven 40 to 50 minutes or until knife inserted in the center comes out clean.

For more detailed information on sweet potatoes, contact your local Clemson University Extension office or call Clemson's Home and Garden Information Center toll-free at 1-888-656-9988.

Sources:

1. United Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Association. *The Fresh Approach to Sweet Potatoes*.
2. Reynolds, Susan and Paulette Williams. *So Easy to Preserve*, Bulletin 989. Revised 1999 by Elizabeth Andress and Judy Harrison. Cooperative Extension Service, University of Georgia.

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