

# How to GROW, HARVEST, CURE & STORE Sweet Potatoes

In regions with shorter growing seasons, consider varieties like Beauregard and O'Henry, which mature more quickly. Generally, you should plant sweet potatoes about two to three weeks after the last spring frost, with the soil temperature reaching around 65 degrees Fahrenheit.

## How to Make Sweet Potato Slips

Begin the process of creating sweet potato slips indoors approximately eight weeks before your planned outdoor planting date. You can initiate sweet potato slips by placing a sweet potato in a container of soil and providing adequate moisture and light. Roots will form, followed by sprouts. Once the slips reach a length of about five to six inches, carefully remove them from the sweet potato. Submerge these slips in water to encourage root development. Continue this process until you have the desired number of slips.

## Where and How to Plant Sweet Potatoes

Select a well-draining location with good soil for planting sweet potatoes, as they do not thrive in waterlogged conditions. Sweet potatoes can be grown in various settings, including in the ground, raised beds, containers, or grow bags. Ensure the chosen area receives plenty of sunlight. Plant each rooted slip deeply, burying them up to the top leaves. Space the slips approximately 12 to 18 inches apart. If your soil lacks phosphorus, consider providing a starter solution high in phosphorus to promote robust root development. Adequately water the slips, and expect some initial dieback as they transition, followed by new growth.

## How Sweet Potatoes Grow

Sweet potatoes develop differently from regular potatoes. They form from the roots of sweet potato slips, with each root thickening into a sweet potato tuber. While the leaves of sweet potatoes are edible and delicious, it's advisable to allow the vines to grow vigorously, as they provide essential energy for tuber development. Ensure that sweet potatoes receive ample sunlight. Periodically check the longer vines to prevent them from rooting along the soil or raised beds, as additional rooting diverts energy away from the main tubers, resulting in smaller sweet potatoes. Sweet potatoes are generally low-maintenance once they begin growing. Water them deeply on occasion, especially during hot and dry periods. Sweet potatoes tolerate dry conditions better than overly wet ones.

### **When to Harvest Sweet Potatoes**

Sweet potatoes are typically ready for harvest between 90 to 120 days after planting. You can gauge their size by digging down a bit; if they are at least three inches in diameter, it's time to harvest. The longer you leave them in the ground, the larger they will grow. Aim to harvest sweet potatoes before the first fall frost; if frost kills the vines, promptly remove the potatoes. Another indicator of readiness is when the vines and leaves begin to turn yellow, signaling a slowdown in production and imminent harvest time.

### **How to Harvest Sweet Potatoes**

To harvest sweet potatoes, start by cutting back all of the vines. Then, carefully loosen the soil around the plant using a spade fork. Look for the primary crown of each plant and use your hands to gently dig up the tubers. Shake off any excess dirt, but be cautious to handle the tubers gently, as their skins are delicate and can bruise easily. Keep them out of direct sunlight and refrain from washing them, as this helps prolong their storage life. Before storing sweet potatoes, it's essential to cure them.

## **How to Cure and Store Harvested Sweet Potatoes**

Curing sweet potatoes is a crucial step that enhances their shelf life and flavor. Place the harvested sweet potatoes in a plastic grocery bag, tie it shut, and store it in a warm spot for approximately 10 to 14 days. This process hardens and tightens the skin around the sweet potatoes, aiding in the healing of any cuts or bruises that may have occurred during harvesting and handling. Curing also converts starches into sugars, enhancing the sweet potatoes' delicious flavor. Be cautious not to over-cure them, as this may lead to sprouting. After curing, discard or use any bruised potatoes immediately. Store the cured sweet potatoes in a cool, dry area with temperatures between 55 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit. As temperatures rise, monitor the potatoes regularly and promptly use any that show signs of sprouting or rotting.