

URBAN FARMER

LOVE THE EARTH

From Seed to Harvest: A beginner's guide to growing sweet potatoes

Sweet potatoes may appear similar to regular potatoes, but unlike regular potatoes which grow best in a cooler environment, sweet potatoes do better in the heat.

To plant:

For those living in warm climates, plant sweet potatoes a month after the last spring frost, as soon as the temperatures outside and the soil temperatures have warmed up considerably. Sweet potatoes aren't grown from seeds. They are grown from slips, which are a rooted portion of a mature sweet potato. To obtain a sweet potato slip, cut a sweet potato in half lengthwise and bury each half in damp potting soil. Keep the slips moist and warm, and shoots should sprout within a few days. Leaves will follow the shoots.

However, the slips still aren't ready to plant into the garden until approximately six weeks after they sprout. Shoots should be between 4 and 8 inches tall before they're transplanted outside.

When planting your slips, don't opt for a normal sweet potato from the grocery store. Purchase sweet potatoes from a seed distributor so you know they are free of disease.

When the shoots are old enough, transplant them outside. Since sweet potatoes like it warm, plant the transplants in raised rows, which are usually about 8 inches higher than ground level. This allows the soil to warm quicker early in the season, and raised rows helps the sweet potatoes stay



[Sweet Potato slips available at ufseeds.com](http://ufseeds.com)

well-drained. To assist in warming the soil even more, spread black plastic along the raised rows. Black plastic should be spread along the rows up to three weeks before planting the sweet potatoes so the soil has plenty of time to warm up.

To plant your shoots, space them 8 to 12 inches apart in the raised rows. Plant them 4 inches deep, and leave 3 to 4 feet of space between each sweet potato row. Some varieties of sweet potatoes are a vining plant, and when the plants grow larger, the vines will take up the space between the rows. Other varieties grow as a bush.

Prior to planting, amend the soil with compost to improve the texture and organic matter. Since sweet potatoes are a root vegetable, they require plenty of air space in the soil to develop their roots.



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Plant the sweet potatoes in full sun, but if you live in a dry, hot region, they will tolerate partial shade in the afternoon.

To grow:

Since sweet potato plants are vining, it doesn't take much time before the vines fill every nook and cranny of your garden, possibly smothering other vegetables or at the least, sucking energy from the sweet potatoes' growth. To prevent this, gently weed the vines two weeks after you've planted the slips. Avoid using a hoe so you don't disrupt the feeder roots.

Water your sweet potato plants weekly since a regular watering schedule will help prevent the sweet potato skin from splitting. Keep in mind sweet potatoes grow best in soil with a pH of 5.8 and 6.2, but they will also tolerate more acidic soil, such as soil with a pH as low as 5.0.

To harvest:

Although sweet potatoes are technically considered a perennial plant, specifically in USA Hardiness Zones 8-11, the plants are dug up to harvest the tubers, meaning they are usually grown as an annual vegetable instead. Tubers are ready to harvest when the plant's foliage turns from green to yellow. The tubers will grow close to the surface, so dig gently when harvesting. If harvesting too roughly, the sweet potato skin will bruise.

What sweet potatoes crave:

While sweet potatoes can crave less-than-satisfactory soil, they will grow a lot better if you utilize fertilizer. To achieve the best effect, add a continuous-release



[Sweet Potatom slips available at ufseeds.com](http://ufseeds.com)

fertilizer containing potassium approximately two weeks after planting the slips. The potassium will be the third number on the fertilizer label. Follow the fertilizer instructions on how to mix it in with the soil. After fertilizing, add biodegradable mulch, such as grass clippings. Continue to add more mulch for another month after fertilizing, but after that, sweet potatoes don't require more fertilizer.

Instead of adding a potassium-rich fertilizer, another option would be to feed the sweet potato plants with a liquid fertilizer at planting time and again every two weeks as the plants grow.

Where to buy sweet potato slips:

Urban Famer sells a large variety of certified sweet potato slips, which means that the slips have been inspected for pests and diseases.

Check out the sweet potato selection on our website at ufseeds.com



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