

Sweet Potato



History

Sweet potatoes originated in the tropical regions of Central and South America. Christopher Columbus discovered the sweet potato growing when he discovered the Americas. The sweet potato was taken back to Spain in 1500. It was cultivated on a small scale in Spain but never became popular across Europe. Cultivation of the sweet potato was tried in Belgium and England in the late 1500s but without much success. Sweet potatoes require a hot, moist climate to thrive, and the northern European weather was not well suited for sweet potato crops. Sweet potatoes have been grown in the United States since 1648, when they were first planted in Virginia. They were grown by the American Indians in the 18th century and were introduced to New England in 1764. Today, sweet potatoes are commonly grown and eaten in the American south, but the Irish potato remains more popular in the North.

Sweet Potato Pioneer

George Washington Carver was an African American who developed a method of crop rotation to allow farmers to earn more money. He taught farmers to rotate cotton fields with soil-enriching crops like sweet potatoes and peanuts. This resulted in new southern crops and allowed farmers to replant the same land over and over again. He also created new uses for the sweet potato including flour, ink, starch, rubber, tapioca, vinegar, glue, and 500 shades of textile dye.

Food for Thought

Many people call sweet potatoes yams, but yams and sweet potatoes are completely different foods. In fact, they are not even closely related as they are from different plant families. Yams are large, starchy roots grown in Africa and Asia and not typically available in American grocery stores. Yams are starchier and drier than sweet potatoes and have less fiber, vitamin C, calcium, and iron.

Fun Facts

- To take in the amount of vitamin A that is in one sweet potato, you would have to eat 23 cups of broccoli.
- Sweet potatoes can be white, yellow, red, purple, and orange.
- The orange-fleshed sweet potatoes are sweeter than the other colored varieties.
- Sweet potatoes are a root vegetable.



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