

Duck Creek Farms

Sweet Potato Culture

Yea, your sweet Potato plants have arrived. They may be wilted and some of the leaves may have yellowed during shipping. This is normal, so not to worry. You can put the roots in a jar of water for a few hours after they arrive to perk them up a bit before planting. Don't worry about yellowed leaves, in fact they may all yellow from the stress of shipping, but they will soon make more and begin to grow like crazy as soon as the weather turns warm enough. Sweet potatoes love the heat, but they may need some shading when you first plant out if it is too hot then. Once the roots begin to form the hotter the better.

1. Transplant Your Sprouts

With sprouts in hand; you're now ready to plant. Sweet Potatoes do best in well-drained, sandy, loamy soil. Light, loamy soils usually result in roots with better shapes than those grown in heavy or clay soils.

- A) Prepare the soil by tilling well and applying an organic or complete conventional type fertilizer with an analyst of at least 8-8-8 at the rate of 2 pounds per 25 feet of row. Push the softened, fertilized soil into a foot-wide, flat-topped ridge row that is 8 inches high. Soil with too high organic matter may cause the roots be discolored when harvested.
- B) Plant sprouts 9 to 12 inches apart in the center of the ridge row and at a depth of 3 inches with at least 2 plant nodes underground and 2 or more leaves above ground. Immediately after transplanting, water well, and keep moist for the next few days.

Fertilizing: Roots (edible) will begin to form in 30 to 45 days and need nitrogen, phosphorus, and potash for optimum growth. Thirty days after transplanting side dress, place fertilizer 2-3 inches to the side of the plant, with an organic or complete conventional fertilizer at the rate of 2 pounds per 25 feet of row.

Insect Control: Be sure to follow all label directions, restrictions, and precautions. Use a foliar spray (consult your State Extension service for recommendations) at the rate listed on the label as necessary. I have found Spinosad, a natural organic pesticide, works well on most insects. Insects actually very rarely attack sweet potatoes.

Weed 'em and Reap: A bit of weeding, done carefully so as not to injure the shallow roots, is usually all that is needed. Uncontrolled weeds can decrease Sweet Potato yields as much as 100%.

2. Harvest Your Sweet Potatoes

Harvesting of Sweet Potato roots is usually done between 90-120 days after transplanting or as soon as possible after a frost has blackened the tops of the plants. Some varieties like Okinawa Purple may take as long as 140 days.

- A) Check roots for maturity. A mature Sweet Potato will have 4 to 5 roots of varying sizes, but the majority should have a 1 3/4 inch diameter and be 3-9 inches in length. You can check for maturity by gently lifting the Sweet Potatoes out of the ground with a shovel making sure they do not become detached from the vine. If not mature, lower back down and cover with soil.
- B) Dig Sweet Potatoes carefully because their skin is thin and they will bruise easily. It is best to wear gloves when handling them. Do not leave the roots exposed to direct

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- sunlight with temperatures above 90 degrees for more than 30 minutes because they will sunscald and be more susceptible to storage rots.
- C) Once the Sweet Potato roots have been removed from the garden spread them out to dry for several hours away from direct sunlight. Once dry, put them in newspaper-lined boxes and leave them in a dry, warm, ventilated area for 2 weeks for curing. Once cured, store in a cool, dry place (50-55 degrees) until you're ready to cook them

Most Sweet Potato varieties can be stored for up to 10 months with little reduction in quality.

A common question I often receive is how far apart should I plant different varieties to keep them from crossing. They won't cross, so no need to worry.

Cuttings

If you receive "cuttings" without roots, you can either put the bottom ends in a glass of water for two to three days to begin the rooting process, or go ahead and plant out with two or more nodes in the ground and keep very moist for a few days to root. Some shade placed over the rooting cuttings may be helpful if it is hot. They will root surprisingly fast.

Enjoy your harvest