

Byte of Sweet Potato  
By Patty "Sassy" Knutson

Is there any other food that can jump from a delectable savory dish to a sweet dessert more readily than sweet potatoes? Whether you enjoy them mashed or baked, roasted or boiled, or pureed for a sweet potato pie, these delicious root vegetables are ready and willing to make your mouth water.

Not only are they tasty, but sweet potatoes are beautiful, which help to activate our taste buds. Coming in many different varieties, the ones most familiar to us are those with pale skin and yellow flesh (which aren't actually sweet at all) and the much sweeter variety with dark skin and bright orange flesh.

We may be drawn to sweet potatoes during the cooler months because these root vegetables are at their peak season during this time. But perhaps the most popular reason we tend to gravitate towards sweet potatoes is simply because they look drop-dead gorgeous in the midst of a holiday feast. And it's these vibrant and gorgeous colors that we'll begin with today...

IT'S TIME FOR A NUTRITIONAL QUICKIE! Wink

Sweet potatoes are a fantastic source of vitamin A. In fact, 1 medium baked sweet potato contains over 260% of your body's daily requirement for this precious vitamin. Wowza!!

But what exactly is vitamin A and what is its role in your body?

Well, "pre-formed vitamin A" is actually only found in animal products.

But the reason sweet potatoes are such a super duper provider of this vitamin is because they contain "carotenoids", which give red, yellow and orange foods their beautiful fall-like color...

...and here's the cool part:

Your body magically converts these carotenoids, such as beta carotene, into useable vitamin A.

Isn't that amazing?

And once converted to vitamin A, the real benefits begin.

Vitamin A is well known for its anti-oxidant powers. It plays an important role by scavenging around for free radicals -- those mean and dirty little chemicals that bounce around and leave a mess in their wake that can lead to cancer, premature aging and cell damage - and quashes them like a bug.

It is believed that those who consume more than average the amount of beta-carotene have a lower incidence of cancer of the lungs, stomach,

colon, bladder, uterus, ovaries and skin.

(Can you guess how far back in time it's believed that sweet potatoes have been a part of the human diet? \*Answer below.)

As Vegetarians, we tend to eat lots of nuts, seeds and oil, grains and legumes, which are all wonderful in their own right - but they can also be a little hard on the liver. If you want to help your poor overworked liver, be sure to eat lots of foods that contain beta-carotene which, once converted into vitamin A, can help your liver tremendously.

Can you eat too much beta-carotene? Probably not, because any excess beta-carotene is simply stored in the body until needed. Whereas vitamin A from animal products or supplements can be toxic in large amounts.

You may also hear vitamin A referred to as retinol because of the vital part it plays in the retina of your eye. To put it VERY simply, vitamin A provides the retina's cells with the raw materials it needs to pick up small amounts of light - which is why night-blindness is one indication of a lack of vitamin A. (Other indications of a vitamin A deficiency? Frequent viral infections, and a goosebump-like appearance to the skin.)

One word of caution: Sweet potatoes contain a great amount of oxalates.

When oxalates become too concentrated, they can crystallize and cause problems. For this reason, if you already have existing and untreated kidney or gallbladder problems, you may want to avoid eating sweet potatoes.

#### SWEET POTATO SERVING IDEAS

Cube, toss with extra-virgin olive oil, sprinkle with salt and pepper, and roast until tender.

Boil, drain and mash, then add a little maple syrup (or agave nectar), non-dairy milk, salt, pepper and cinnamon.

Slice and bake for delectable little sweet potato chips.

Chop potatoes small. Create a sauce by melting Earth Balance with a little Bragg's Liquid Aminos, brown rice syrup and basil -- pour over potatoes and bake until tender.

Grate and make a batch of sweet potato hash browns.

And the fun has only just begun. Follow this link to learn how to cook with Sweet Potatoes, including how to Clean and Prep your sweet potatoes, Cooking Techniques, a complete list of Sweet Potato's

"Vegan Flavor Matches", Helpful Hints, and Nutritional Information.

Happy cooking!

(Answer: Prehistoric times! Evidence has been found in the caves of Peru that date back 10,000 years.)

About the author:

Sassy is a Vegan Chef and Nutritional Consultant.

Her website [VeganCoach.com](http://VeganCoach.com) was created to marry these two loves, along with over a decade of vegan experience, by teaching her fellow vegans the secret to balanced vegan nutrition and easy vegan cooking without recipes.