

# Growing Sweet Potatoes

Sweet potatoes are a warm-weather crop usually associated with the southern United States but they can be grown in Pennsylvania.



## Selecting and Preparing a Site

Choose a spot with well-drained soil that receives full sun. Sandy soil is preferable. If your soil is clay, rocky, or compacted, consider using raised beds.



## Planting

Sweet potatoes are grown from “slips” (sprouts) and not from seeds. Slips can be found in garden centers, nurseries, local farmers, or mail order companies. Do not plant slips until the soil has warmed to 65°F, in late May or early June. Sweet potatoes take 90 to 120 days to mature.

Create raised mounds about 6 to 8 inches tall and 12 inches wide, leaving 3 feet between mounds. Plant the slips on a warm, overcast day. Break off the lower leaves and set the slips deep enough to cover the root and the stem. Water with a liquid fertilizer. Then water generously for 7 to 10 days to make sure the plants take root. Protect young sweet potato plants from late frosts or cold nights (lower than 55°F) by covering them with plastic milk jugs or row covers. Remove covers during the day.



## Caring for the Site

Apply fertilizer 3 to 4 weeks after planting. Weed regularly beginning 2 weeks after planting. Water regularly, especially during mid-summer. Later in the season, water less frequently to avoid cracking of the sweet potatoes’ skins. Do not prune vines.



## Harvesting

Sweet potatoes should be ready to harvest about 100 days after planting, when the leaves and ends of vines have started turning yellow. Loosen the soil around each plant and cut away some vines. Pull up the primary crown and dig up the roots by hand, handling the sweet potatoes carefully as they bruise easily. Shake off excess dirt but do not wash them. Sweet potatoes should be harvested before the first fall frost.



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