



SUSTAINABLE HOLLY

PLANT OF
THE MONTH

SWEET POTATO

APRIL 2021

SWEET POTATO

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A great base crop for any homesteader as they provide a lot of food on a single plant and can be used to feed you throughout the year. They can be used in both sweet and savoury dishes and both the leaves and the roots are edible! They can be grown in containers but in-ground will give you a significantly larger more successful crop. Sweet potatoes make a great living ground cover and bottom layer of a food forest.

How to grow

Sweet potatoes grow as a vine on top of the ground and produce large root vegetables beneath the soil. The great thing is, although you can purchase sweet potato plants, you can also grow them from cuttings or scraps!

Climate

Sweet potatoes don't like frosts or really cold climates. For some this means they will be a seasonal crop over the warmer months and for others with more mild winters they can be grown year round. Plant your Sweet Potatoes in Spring after the last frost.

Care / maintenance

Sweet potatoes like lots of sun and adequate watering. They are pretty hardy and can survive in sandy soils and low water but they will not produce as many sweet potatoes.

Prepare the garden bed with plenty of compost. The leaves will droop if they need water and be sure not to over water them, especially during the cooler months. Having the soil sit too wet and soggy will promote rot.

Pests

The leaves of sweet potato can get eaten by pests and unless it is significant, they should be fine to grow on successfully. Be careful of rodents as the sweet potato tubers will get closer to the surface of the soil as they mature. If you notice any holes in your sweet potato roots, a netted fence or guard may be necessary to keep the rodents away!

Reproduce

You can grow sweet potatoes the following year by replanting your left over tubers. Cut them into 5-10cm pieces to grow multiple plants. Take cuttings from the vines and keep in jars of water. Refresh the water every week and you can have beautiful house plants during the cooler months and then plant out in spring.



Harvesting

There are two ways to harvest your sweet potatoes and that is to dig around and pull up a few tubers as required or remove the whole crop at once. If you live in a cooler climate it would be best to dig up your whole crop at the end of summer or autumn. To get the most out of your harvests, it is best to dig up and replant fresh each year.

Cooking

Sweet potato shoots & leaves are edible and packed full of nutrients. The leaves can be used as a substitute for spinach. Cook them off slightly or use the young leaves fresh. Wash the white sap off well before using. Add to pesto, stirfry, curry, soup, stew, smoothies or omelettes. Sautee with garlic and butter or ginger, chilli & tamari sauce.

The tubers are a great source of carbohydrates and calories. Here are some of my favourite ways to eat sweet potato: roasted, mashed, sweet potato fries or wedges, thinly cut potato chips, baked and stuffed, added to curry, stews and salads.

Preserving your harvest

To store sweet potatoes brush off any soil and make sure they are completely dry. Store in a cool, dark place for 3-4 months.

BEST OF SWEET POTATO

- Quick growing and hardy
- Edible throughout the growing period by eating the leaves and shoots
- Produce an abundance of food from each plant
- Create habitat for beneficial insects
- Act as a living ground cover to protect the soil
- Good base crop for self-sufficiency
- Versatility - can be used in a wide range of ways and dishes
- Easy to propagate - you could sell extra plants
- Biomass and chop and drop to improve soil