

Sweet Potatoes New And Improved

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(NAPSA)—Sweet potatoes have moved way beyond the fat-loaded, overly sweet holiday side dishes that were once their only claim to fame. Their power packed nutrition profile, ease of preparation and naturally sweet taste have landed them front and center for those of us who want healthy, delicious foods that fit a lifestyle where more time is spent enjoying a meal than preparing it.

Sweet potatoes took top honors in two surveys ranking the nutritional benefits of vegetables by the Center For Science in the Public Interest. In their Nutrition Action Health Letter they recognized sweet potatoes as an important source of vitamins A and C, fiber and potassium.

The bright orange color of sweet potatoes tips us off to their carotenoids. These phytonutrients are antioxidants that may help prevent some types of cancer and diseases of aging by disabling the free radicals that damage the body's cells and tissues.

Beyond its work as an antioxidant, vitamin A helps with normal vision in low light and protects us from infections by keeping skin and tissues in the mouth, stomach, intestines and respiratory tract healthy. Vitamin C is needed for a strong immune system, and healthy gums and connective tissues.

Sweet potatoes are a good source of potassium and low in sodium, which is more good news for health conscience folks. Diets rich in foods that are good sources of potassium and low in sodium may reduce the risk of high blood pressure and stroke.

But the best news about sweet potatoes is that they are delicious, easy to fix and available every day of the year. There are dozens of ways to fix sweet potatoes. These are some of my favorites:

- Slice sweet potatoes into ½-inch thick pieces and lightly coat with vegetable oil. Bake at 350 degrees in a single layer on a baking sheet for 20 to 30 minutes. Bake them next to seasoned, boneless chicken breasts or fish fillets for a really easy meal that just needs a salad to make it perfect.

- Add cubed sweet potatoes to

soups and stews. They cook quickly, so add one-inch cubes about 15 to 20 minutes before serving.

- Peel and slice sweet potatoes into ¼ inch rounds and layer with apple slices or canned mandarin orange sections in a shallow baking dish. Dot with a little margarine. Cover and bake at 350 degrees for about 30 minutes until tender. A touch of cinnamon and ground ginger is very nice in this recipe.

But the hands down favorite in my home is baked sweet potatoes and a selection of toppings that includes everybody's favorite.



Elizabeth Pivonka



Photo courtesy North Carolina SweetPotato Commission.

Bake or Microwave the Sweet Potatoes.

Prick the skin and bake at 400 degrees for 40 to 50 minutes or microwave on high power three to six minutes until done.

Split Open, Add Your Favorite Topping and ENJOY.

- Canned, crushed pineapple
- Warm honey and chopped pecans
- Cranberry sauce and toasted sliced almonds
- Garlic and rosemary sautéed in light olive oil
- Vanilla flavored yogurt and cinnamon sugar
- Warm applesauce and walnuts

One plain medium sweet potato (5 inches long and 2 inches in diameter) has: 123 Calories; 2g Protein; 0g Fat; 28g Carbohydrate; 0g Cholesterol; 3g Fiber; 11mg Sodium.

For more information on sweet potatoes and other fruits and vegetables go to: www.ncsweetpotatoes.com, www.5aday.com, www.aboutproduce.com.