

# Growing Sweet Potatoes



KCCG sells **Beauregard** sweet potato slips. These slips take 90-100 days to grow and boast high yields of 6-8 sweet potatoes per plant. These sweet potatoes have light tan-purple skin and dark orange flesh.

## When to plant

Plant sweet potatoes in mid-May to mid-June, when night temperatures are consistently above 60 degrees. If you plant later than mid-June, your sweet potatoes will not have enough time to get big.

## How to plant

KCCG sweet potato slips are planted in small pots with 12 plants per pot. This helps the slips to continue growing and keeps the roots moist. If you are not going to plant your slips right away, keep them in the pot in a sunny location and make sure to water often to keep the soil moist.

Preparing the ground:

- Loosen the soil where your sweet potatoes will grow with a tiller, garden fork or hoe. Raised beds are ideal for planting sweet potatoes.
- Dig holes 4-8" deep. The holes do not need to be very wide.
- Space your holes 12-18" apart. Sweet potatoes will be smaller if you plant them closer. If you want lots of smaller sweet potatoes, plant 12" apart, if you want less sweet potatoes that are larger in size, give them more room. If you are planting in a ground plot and want to leave paths between your sweet potato rows, plant in rows spaced 3-4' apart.

Planting your slips:

- Carefully tip the slips out of the pot and shake off the extra potting soil.
- Gently pull apart the slips and wrap in a damp paper towel or cloth. Keep inside a plastic bag or bucket so they don't dry out.
- Set one slip into each hole. Make sure all the roots are covered with soil. You can plant all the way up to the first leaves.
- Fill the hole in with loose soil around the slip.
- Water your plants right away. Use luke-warm water, if possible. Make sure to water deeply.

## Care

Sweet potatoes are a relatively easy crop to grow, and do not require much maintenance. Following these steps, however, will yield the best crop:

- Mulch your sweet potatoes with straw or cotton burr compost to keep the soil cool and retain soil moisture. Mulch after soil has warmed up.
- Once the vines start growing, they will cover your sweet potato beds with a thick layer of leaves and you will not have many problems with weeds. Until then, make sure to keep the area between the vines weeded.
- You do not need to clip off the vines as they grow. If they grow out of the designated area, just pick them up and redirect them back into your sweet potato area.
- Sweet potato vines are a favorite snack for deer and rabbits. If you live in an area with a large deer population, you may need to cover the area with row cover or a cage until vines are large.

## **Harvesting**

It is important to harvest sweet potatoes before cold weather sets in, as cold temperatures will damage the sweet potatoes. Optimal harvesting time is usually between September 5-25. Harvest sweet potatoes when the ground is dry. Stop watering for 1-2 weeks before you harvest. Watch the weather forecast for a warm, dry harvesting window.

To harvest:

- Use pruners to cut vines off near the top of the sweet potato plant and remove vines from your sweet potato bed.
- Using a garden fork, dig about 12" out from the center of the plant. Pry up the ground around your sweet potato plants and you can use your hands to pull out the sweet potatoes.
- You can lightly brush the dirt off of the sweet potato. Even if the sweet potato is muddy, do not wash it off.

## **Storage**

Set aside any sweet potatoes that were stabbed or snapped in half during harvesting. These should be used first as they will not store well. Put all undamaged sweet potatoes into a basket or box with ventilation and bring inside your house for drying and storage. Store at room temperatures (60-75 degrees). Sweet potatoes will keep the longest with minimal disturbance – try not to move them around too much in their storage container.