



# SWEET POTATO GROWING GUIDE FOR THE MIDWEST

## **Planting Times**

In the Midwest, wait until the end of May-early June to plant out your sweet potatoes. Wait until the danger of frost is gone and the average temperatures are above 70° F. Sweet potatoes will not grow well in cold weather so there is no need to try to get them out early in the season. If possible, find a well drained soil for the planting site. Till the soil and lay black plastic/ black landscape fabric over the rows. Cut a slit into the fabric and plant slips accordingly. Space plants 12" to 18" apart within the row, and space rows 3 to 4 feet apart. Place a flag at the origin of planting. This will help guide digging at harvest time. It is important to water the transplants at planting time. Water well for the first week or until the plants do not look wilted. Generally, they should look great after a week of good heat and water.

In heavy clay soils build a mound the length of the row about 12-15" high and 18" wide. Cover the top of the mound with fabric and follow the above instructions.

## **Season Maintenance**

Check your plants often. Carefully pick up each vine beginning at the flag and gently lift it up to prevent it from rooting. This allows more energy to go to the main plant and thus producing larger sweet potatoes. It is not necessary to do routine irrigation during the season unless the plants look wilted. Sweet potatoes thrive in a sandy soil that is well drained so they should do fine in Midwest soils without much irrigation needs.

## Pests

Deer love the sweet taste of the leaves and this is the main seasonal pest battle. Use appropriate blood sprays, fencing or other deterrents to keep the sweet potato crop safe.

## Harvest

The majority of sweet potato varieties require an average of 4 to 5 months to reach maturity. Due to the shorter growing season in the Midwest, we rely on what the weather is doing for a harvest decision. Mid September is a good general recommendation. Also, sweet potatoes need to be out of the ground before the ground temperature drops to 55° F. This will prevent fungal growth and increase the length of the storage time for your bounty.

Most of the sweet potato crop should be found growing below your main plant (the flagged area). However, a few tubers may have grown parallel to the soil line so be careful when digging. The more the tubers are handled, the more likely they will become bruised or damaged and the shorter shelf life they will have. At harvest, gently brush off large clumps of soil being careful not to rub off the tender skin. After the curing process, it will be safe to remove excess soil from the sweet potato tubers.

## Curing and Winter Storage

Place tubers in a warm place and out of direct sunlight with a suggested temperature of 85° F and high relative humidity. Let them sit for a week to cure. To store, place your sweet potatoes in a ventilated plastic container in a shaded/dark area. The room temperature should be around 60-70° F. Periodically check the sweet potatoes and remove any that have rotted.

