

Did You Know?



This holiday season as you enjoy your sweet potato pie, casserole, yams, or other yummy staple, you might want to share some ARS sweet potato research stories with friends and family.

The sweet potato was grown in Peru as early as 750 B.C., and Native Americans were growing them when Columbus arrived in 1492. George Washington grew them on his farm in Mount Vernon, VA, and *George Washington Carver*

developed 118 different products from them—from soaps and cosmetics to adhesives, greases and paints.

Sweet potatoes are often called a “nutritional powerhouse.” They are very high in beta carotene and other nutrients. One cup of sweet potato contains 39.2 milligrams of vitamin C, 0.576 milligrams of vitamin B6, 950 milligrams of potassium and 6.6 grams of dietary fiber.

ARS scientists at the U.S. Vegetable Laboratory in Charleston, SC, have found that sweet potatoes also contain high levels of protective phenolic compounds called caffeoylquinic acids. These compounds are known for their antioxidant activity, with the highest levels found just under the skin.

ARS’ Food Science Research Unit in Raleigh, NC, developed a process to improve the texture and flavor of sweet potatoes so that they may be used to make savory snacks of patties and fries. A taste panel found that the new process yields products with a taste that’s more like fresh-baked sweet potatoes. The researchers found that slicing and slow-cooking sweet potatoes is the best way to retain flavor. This method has a benefit that could add value to the \$213-million sweet potato crop by offering companies a way to use sweet potatoes that normally would be discarded due to less-than-perfect shape or size.

ARS researchers have also developed new sweet potato breeding lines that can be grown with fewer pesticides because they are resistant to key sweet potato pests like root-knot nematodes, Fusarium wilt and soil insects. These new lines also grow and produce well in the South. ARS scientists also have played a key role in finding ways to protect the sweet potato against some of its worst natural enemies, including the sweet potato weevil, by identifying irradiation as a way to prevent the weevils from hitching a ride on sweet potato shipments.

Pretty sweet, huh?

So while you savor the soft, smooth, succulent sweet potato this holiday season, be sure to give thanks to ARS scientists for their research!

North Carolina’s Favorite Sweet Potato Pie

(Yield 8 servings)

- 2 1/4 C. cooked, mashed sweet potatoes
- 3/4 C. granulated sugar
- 1/2 C. firmly packed brown sugar
- 1/2 C. packaged French vanilla instant pudding
- 3/4 C. evaporated milk
- 2 large eggs, room temperature
- 6 Tbsp. butter or margarine, softened
- 1 Tsp. ground cinnamon
- 1 1/2 Tbsp. vanilla extract
- 1 unbaked pie shell (9-inch)

In a large bowl combine all ingredients and beat at medium speed until well blended. Spread evenly into unbaked pie shell. Bake at 450 degrees F. for 10 minutes. Reduce temperature to 350 degrees F. and bake for 40 minutes longer or until set. Cool on wire rack. If desired, garnish with whipped cream, raspberries and mint leaves.

Source: [The United States Sweet Potato Council](#)

Written by **Jay Green**, ARS Information Staff.

Executive Editor

Sandy Miller Hays

Managing Editor

Tara Weaver-Missick

Writer-Editor

Mina Chung

Designer-Editor

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Contributors

Diona Austil

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David Brauer

Sue Burgess

Kathryn R. Clough

Carol Durflinger

Jennifer Friel

Jennifer Gilbert

Jay Green

Tracy Havermann

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