

Sweet Potatoes Are Just As Sweet Without The Sugar

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PREPARING FOR THE HOLIDAYS

When I think of the holidays, I remember the dining room table surrounded by family and friends with old, familiar stories being told and re-told with a great deal of laughter resulting. I remember food running the entire length of the table to be served family-style so everyone could have exactly what they wanted in the quantity desired. Today, the food on the Christmas table is traditionally served the same at my house but as I have become more aware of health and nutrition, I have had to make changes to some of the items to make them more nutritionally “friendly”. I believe that can be done without sacrificing taste.

One food that many people consider a holiday entrée that makes its way to my table in a variety of ways throughout the year is sweet potatoes. I have had to modify my mother’s recipe that included ample amount of brown sugar, butter and marshmallows but in doing so I have discovered the rich taste of the potato without all of the caloric additions. We can develop a taste for them without all of the additions that we thought were necessary. What would happen if we raised a generation of children who did not even consider all of the additions to make a simple food like a potato delicious in its own rights?

The Origin of a Sweet Potato

Sweet potatoes are a Native American plant that was the main source of nourishment of early homesteaders and for soldiers during the Revolutionary War. These tuberous roots are among the most nutritious foods in the vegetable kingdom. They are excellent sources of vitamins A and C. This is why one colonial physician called them the “vegetable indispensable.”

Storage

Sweet potatoes spoil rapidly. To keep them fresh, store them in a dry, cool place. Do not store them in the refrigerator where they will develop a hard core and an “off” taste. If stored properly, sweet potatoes will keep for a month or longer. Brush off the excess dirt before storing, but do not wash them until you are ready to cook them. It is the moisture from washing that will increase their spoilage.

Preparation

Wash sweet potatoes well. Cook them whole whenever possible as most of the nutrients are next to the skin. Pierce the skin with a fork several times to prevent them from exploding in the oven. Place the potatoes in a pan and cook in the oven heated to 375° for about 45 minutes or until tender. Don’t forget to place a pan under the potatoes for there could be some seepage as the potato cooks. This is a messy clean up- job that is easily avoided. I do not wrap my potatoes in tin foil while many people do because I would prefer a *baked* product, not the *steamed* potato that results from the tin foil wrapping.

Sweet potatoes can be cooked in the microwave. Wash and pierce the potatoes and place them on a paper towel. The cooking time for 2 medium potatoes is on high from 5-9 minutes; for 4 potatoes, 10-13 minutes. The time differs with the size of the potato and the microwave used. In addition, remember the potato cooks a little more after leaving the oven. They can be taken from the oven a little under-cooked and be ready when placed on the service plate. When time is not a factor, most people prefer oven cooked potatoes especially if the conventional oven can be filled with other items that can be cooked at the same time. This saves energy.

Nutrition of a Sweet Potato

So what is a sweet potato worth nutritionally----A LOT!!! That is why they are a regular item in my diet. A serving size for an average-sized sweet potato is 1/2 cup baked. This serving of sweet potato will provide 90 calories of rich nutrients. Specifically, the nutrients are 11% of your daily need for dietary fiber, 380% of your

daily need of Vitamin A and 35% of your daily need for Vitamin C. (The percent of the Daily Values is based on a 2,000 calorie diet.)

A small dab of butter or margarine, a sprinkle of cinnamon and sugar or a sugar substitute and I am just as satisfied as I was in my youth with a serving of sweet potatoes with marshmallow, walnuts, butter and an ample addition of brown sugar.

Try these ideas and I think you will agree that we will be miles ahead nutritionally without sacrificing overall taste.

If you have a question, write to Shelley Swenson, Extension Agent Family and Consumer Sciences, University of Florida Extension--Wakulla County, 84 Cedar Avenue, Crawfordville, FL 32327-2063; or call the Extension Office 926-3931, between 8 a.m. to noon or 1 to 5 p.m. weekdays.

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