



## Produce Profile: SWEET POTATOES



Who knew there was so much to learn about organic sweet potatoes!? OGC has embarked on a project to champion these tasty tuberous roots. This category holds a dynamic and delicious lineup of options, from familiar orange- and red-flesh to lesser-known purple-hued potatoes and delicious white-flesh types, too. Use this Produce Profile, along with all the resources in OGC's Sweet Potato Toolkit to educate your crew, share this knowledge with shoppers and help grow the sweet potato love.

### WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SWEET POTATO AND A YAM?

The sweet tuberous roots that North American shoppers know and love, and that come in a variety of skin and flesh colors, are in fact sweet potatoes, not yams. OGC is making the transition to reference them by their true botanical name.

Despite orange- and red-flesh varieties sold in the U.S. as “yams,” they’re not actually a member of the true yam family. True yams are cultivated in Africa, Asia, Latin America, The Caribbean and Oceania, and are not yet grown commercially in the U.S. Preferring tropical and sub-tropical environments, yams don’t thrive in U.S. growing regions, while sweet potatoes do.

Sweet potatoes are more bulbous in the middle than yams and taper to a point, while yams tend to be longer with a more consistent circumference. Yams are more starchy than sweet potatoes and not very sweet. Because of their fundamental differences, sweet potatoes and yams are suited to different preparations.

### WHEN WERE SWEET POTATOES INTRODUCED TO THE UNITED STATES?

A few theories exist as to how these tuberous roots made their way to what is now South and Central America and eventually to North America. They’re believed to have originated in Polynesia and seeds were likely brought to the Americas by Polynesian sailors over 5000 years ago. By the 1700’s, Indigenous tribes in North America had cultivated this crop and when European settlers arrived in what is now the United States, this food had become an established staple that was adopted into the cuisine of the “new world.”

### HOW DID WE COME TO CALL SOME CROPS YAMS AND OTHERS SWEET POTATO?

The dark chapter of U.S. history that brought enslaved Africans across the Atlantic heavily impacted the naming of these tuberous roots. Once sweet potatoes arrived in what is now Virginia, enslaved Africans recognized them as similar to the roots they cultivated in West Africa. They were known by many names including nyam, nyami or enyame (meaning “to eat”). These words later evolved to yam and popularized by communities of enslaved Africans.

In the 1930’s a new orange-fleshed variety of sweet potato was developed at the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center that was larger and sweeter than existing crops. To distinguish it from other sweet potatoes, it was marketed as a “yam” and has since become a source of confusion for eaters to this day.



## WHY DOES THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN YAMS AND SWEET POTATOES MATTER?

Currently, USDA regulations require yam labels to be followed by the term “sweet potato.” And, even though true yams are still not a widely cultivated commercial crop, one can find them grown at a smaller scale in African, Caribbean and other communities within the U.S. Understanding the fundamental difference between these two crops and moving toward true botanical naming conventions can help consumers understand, celebrate and enjoy the differences between yams and sweet potatoes.

## WHICH VARIETIES OF SWEET POTATOES DOES OGC CARRY?

We're proud to carry an assortment of organic sweet potatoes to meet the needs of every produce department, shopper and menu. Look to OGC as the best source for the following delicious sweet potatoes:

- Garnet red sweet potato
- Jewel orange sweet potato
- white sweet potato
- Japanese sweet potato
- Stokes purple sweet potato
- Ben Yagi purple sweet potato
- Okinawa purple sweet potato



## WHICH TYPE OF SWEET POTATO IS “GARNET YAM” AND WHICH IS “JEWEL YAM”?

The most sold sweet potato in the US has traditionally been referred to as a “Garnet yam.” This tuber is in fact a red sweet potato. A “Jewel yam” is an orange sweet potato.

While your Account Representative will know what you're referring to when you ask for a Garnet or Jewel, these items will now appear on invoices as sweet potatoes.

## WHEN ARE SWEET POTATOES AVAILABLE?

New crop sweet potatoes are harvested July through September, then stored to maximize availability with most varieties typically available year-round with some gapping expected in June on Okinawa, Japanese and potentially other varieties depending on the previous years' season. Produce departments can feel confident planning for 365 days of most sweet potatoes.

## WHICH VARIETIES ARE BEST FOR DIFFERENT CULINARY APPLICATIONS?

Similar to the winter squash category, sweet potato varieties range in color, sweetness and the moisture content of their flesh. Typically, any variety of sweet potato will produce delicious sweet potato fries.

Garnet and Jewel tend to be sweeter, with moist flesh, making them ideal for casseroles and mash. Many do enjoy the denser texture of purple varieties in mash, and for that reason Okinawa has traditionally been used in Hawaiian cuisine as a mashed side dish.

Japanese, white and purple varieties have less moisture, and that lends these types well to preparations where they ideally hold their shape. Think, cubed in stews and roasted or sauteed for hash.

There's truly no wrong way to enjoy a sweet potato and it's up to each eater's preference. When introducing new varieties to shoppers, sharing information about flesh color, sweetness and moisture content will help them make educated choices.

Find a set of Sweet Potato POP included in this Toolkit. Easy to download and print, these informational signs will help guide shoppers!

## SHARE THIS INFO WITH EATERS

- What we traditionally refer to as a yam, is in fact a sweet potato.
- True yams are not commercially grown organically in the U.S. yet.
- A “Garnet yam” is a red sweet potato.
- A “Jewel yam” is an orange sweet potato.
- Sweet potatoes are rich in fiber, Vitamin A and beta-carotene. Purple-flesh varieties also boast plenty of anthocyanin which works as an antioxidant.
- Sweet potatoes can be subbed for Russet, red, yellow and purple potatoes in many recipes.
- Available all year round, sweet potatoes are a delicious staple ingredient to incorporate into menu-planning.



## MERCHANDISING TIPS

- Big, beautiful displays of sweet potatoes mean movement and sales for your department. Keep displays fresh, neat and appealing. Add informational signage and recipe ideas that inspire customers to roast, bake, mash or fry.
- Useful for adding interest to dry tables, sweet potatoes add visually appealing shapes and colors to more familiar Russets, red and yellow potatoes and play well with onion sets too. Placing sweet potatoes within/ adjacent to potatoes and onions is always a solid move.
- Separate similar looking varieties from each other to aid customer selection. For example, make sure to separate Garnet red sweet potato from Jewel orange sweet potato with color breaks of white sweet potato or items of a different shape such as an onion or potato.
- Display the flesh. Purple varieties are hard to resist once shoppers see their vibrant color and being able to see beneath the skin to know if a variety is orange or white-fleshed can help make the decision to purchase an easier one.
- Cross-merchandising helps inspire impulse purchases! Try bringing in grocery items to inspire recipes like herbs, spices and pre-made pie crusts or produce items like collard greens, cauliflower and other stewing or roasting veg.
- Take advantage of seasonal eating and holidays where potatoes have typically reigned supreme to showcase sweet potatoes. Many varieties can be subbed for potatoes in recipes to add exciting flavor and texture.
- Consider promotional pricing to build awareness and establish an eater base.