

How to grow Sweet Potatoes. Part 1

Sweet Potatoes are not actually Potatoes, as sweet Potatoes belong to the Bindweed or Morning Glory family. Because of this we can't just pop a sweet Potato into the ground like an ordinary Potato and expect it to grow more, what we must do instead is grow some slips. Slips are the shoots that grow out of the sweet Potato, which are then snapped off with their root system and planted as a separate plant.

There are two different methods to grow your slips, one of which I'm going to try for the first time. But firstly, we need to get our starter sweet potatoes. I'm fortunate in that I've kept a few potatoes back from my harvest in October, but the easiest way is to simply go to your local supermarket and buy a couple there, preferably organic. You don't need large Potatoes; a couple of smaller ones will be sufficient. I should mention here that you can buy slips online from seed companies, but they will be rather expensive, and you don't know what condition

they will be in when they turn up in the post.



The next thing to do for the first method is to figure out which way they go up. The sweet Potato will have a flat end and a pointy end. The flat end goes down and will be in the water. Sometimes when you get them, they will have two pointy ends. If this is what you have, it will be the wider/thicker pointy end that goes downwards.



Next, you'll need some cocktail sticks or toothpicks, a glass container, something like an empty jam jar and some water. You need to push three or four sticks into the Potato around halfway up. If you've ever tried to grow an Avocado pip, it's the same principle, but you want the Potato to be about 50% in the water.

Lastly you need to pop it in a nice sunny spot and change the water every 2-4 days and wait. After a couple of weeks, you should be able to see some little shoots developing. When these shoots get to about five inches and you can see roots growing from the bottom, this is the time to snap them off from the potato and put them in a clean jar of water and again keep them in a sunny spot and well-watered until it's warm enough to plant them out which will be about June time. In the meantime, the vines will carry on growing.

The second method, which apparently is quicker and the one I'm trying for the first time is where you lay the potato down on its side (quite handy if you can't decide which is top and which is bottom) in some moist multi-purpose compost. If you use a see through container you can check out the root growth when your slips begin to grow. Again, the potatoes need to be in a warm sunny spot and kept watered so they don't dry out.



In next month's newsletter hopefully, we will all have some slips ready to go onto the next stage. If you have any questions don't hesitate to ping me an email.

A few things about sweet potatoes.

Sweet potatoes store for a long time.
You can eat the young leaves which tastes like mild Spinach.
Sweet potatoes are full of vitamin A, C and B6.
They can very successfully be grown in pots on sunny balconies or patios. In fact, I get better results growing them in pots than I do growing them in the ground.

Below you can see the slips growing out of the pots and climbing up the wire trellis. They also have lovely flowers right at the end of their growing time. This is where you can see that they are from the Morning Glory family.

