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Sweetpotato Newsletter No. 6: Harvest, Curing, and Storage

Washington State University, October 2025

<https://vegetables.wsu.edu/sweetpotato>

Welcome to the sixth sweetpotato newsletter of 2025! In this newsletter we will discuss harvest, curing, and storage practices. Please feel free to contact us with additional questions!

- Sammi Grieger: samantha.grieger@wsu.edu (*Olympic/Kitsap Peninsula*)
- Laura Schulz: laura.schulz@wsu.edu (Other areas in WA/OR)

Harvest

- Sweetpotatoes are a perennial plant, so there are **no external harvest indicators** (flowering is unrelated to root development; do not wait for vines to die back).
- **Cutting vines before harvest** is not necessary but can be done a few days to a week before root harvest to make harvest easier. Vines can be fed to **livestock!**
- **Harvest sweetpotatoes before soil temperatures drop below 50°F** to avoid chilling injury, and before the fall and winter rains start. In Mount Vernon, WA, sweetpotatoes are typically harvested during the first and second week of October.
- Consider **digging up one or two plants** of each variety to **see if roots are ready** to be harvested. If they are still too small, wait another couple of weeks as long as the weather is still warm.
- Sweetpotatoes can be **harvested by hand** with a shovel or fork.
- On a **larger scale**, a **potato digger** can be used, set the depth as deep as possible, ideally 8 inches or more.
- Take care to **minimize puncturing, skinning, or bruising** sweetpotatoes during harvest.

Pests, Diseases, and Physiological Disorders



Wireworm damaged sweetpotato



Sweetpotato scurf



Corky root (enlarged lenticels)

- **Wireworms** are the primary insect pest of sweetpotato. They create holes in the roots, but damage is superficial, and storage life is still good as long as curing is done effectively.
- Sweetpotato **scurf** is a superficial disease that causes purplish-brown stain-like lesions on sweetpotato skin. The disease progresses under high humidity, usually during storage or after heavy rainfall in the field. It can reduce marketability so separate the infected roots and do not use the infected roots for slip production next year. Scurf has been reported in the Pacific Northwest on sweetpotato, where it is typically brought in on infected slips.
- **Corky root** occurs when lenticels in the root's skin swell resulting in small, raised corky lumps. Corky root is seen on roots grown in overly wet soil, which may affect marketability. Some varieties are more prone than others, but this is a physiological disorder and not a disease, so affected roots do not need to be separated or discarded.
- Sweetpotatoes may **split** along the length of the root in response to water stress or other conditions. Growth cracks form when roots experience a dry period in the soil followed by heavy rain or irrigation events.
- **Chilling injury** occurs in sweetpotatoes exposed to temperatures below 50°F, but symptoms may not manifest for weeks or months after damage occurs. The most common symptoms are surface pitting, reduced storage life, and increased susceptibility to rot. To avoid chilling injury, harvest before the soil gets too cold, and provide supplemental heat when curing sweetpotatoes in a high tunnel or greenhouse where night temperatures fall below 50°F.

Curing

- Curing is an **essential postharvest step** that serves three primary purposes: **increase storage life**, **heal wounds** to prevent pathogen entry and moisture loss, and **enhance flavor**.
- Begin the curing process **as soon as possible** after harvest. Brush off excess soil but **do not wash** sweetpotato roots after harvest.
- During curing, maintain warm and humid conditions for 1 to 3 weeks. Ideal conditions for curing are **80–90°F** and **80–90% relative humidity** for **1 week**. However, curing can be done successfully at lower temperatures and will just take longer, 2 to 3 weeks, for example.
- **Heat** can be maintained with a built-in room heater, a space heater, or by placing roots in a greenhouse or a naturally warm area of your home.
- **Humidity** can be maintained with a small humidifier or trays of water. Ensure moisture does not accumulate on root surfaces as this will lead to mold and rotting.
- **Curing is complete** when the roots do not skin easily, wounds are visibly healed over with a white layer of cells, and the roots taste sweet.

Storage

- After curing is complete, store sweetpotatoes at **55–60°F**, **80–90% relative humidity** (for example, at a cool room temperature or in an insulated room). Storage can be done in the same room used for curing, with the heater turned to low or off. Properly cured sweetpotatoes can be stored for **6 to 12 months** or more.



Did you know: Sweetpotato vines can be fed to livestock! Learn more about feeding vines to livestock in this article [Observational-study-of-livestock-acceptance-of-feeding-sweetpotato-vines-After-Radhikas-observations.pdf](#)

This material is based upon work that is supported by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture, U.S. Department of Agriculture, under award number 2022-38640-37490 through the Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program under project number SW23951. USDA is an equal opportunity employer and service provider. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the view of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.