



Scandia, MN
20021 St Croix Trail North
651.433.2431

Stillwater MN
2100 Tower Drive
651.439.2140

St Croix Falls WI
1257 State Road 35
715.483.3040

www.abrahamsonnursery.com

Sweet Potatoes

Sweet Potatoes arrive as 'slips'—basically a rooted cutting that you plant in your garden. The slips are sent to us from Tennessee, where they were growing in fields. They may look wilted or have marked leaves but they will recover and grow well. Sweet Potatoes are very strong and resilient plants.

For all their strengths, they don't like cool soil or cool weather. They usually aren't planted until May 15 or later. Early June certainly isn't too late.

When you get the slips home, remove the packing from the bundle of slips and set the roots into a cup or jar of shallow water. Keep them out of direct sun until you're ready to plant.

When you plant—

- Plant in the afternoon, after the day's heat.
- Rows should be 36" apart. Work the soil in the row into a mound (a 12 inch high mound if you can). The space between the mounded rows becomes the walkway.
- Some growers put black plastic over the row and plant through that. The black plastic will help keep the soil warmer and also smother out weeds.
- In the mounded row, set the slips 10-18" apart in a line down the row. Water each slip right away. Keep the soil moist for a week or two, until the slips have started to grow.

Average fertility is fine. If you use fertilizer, just treat part of the row. Then in a week or two you'll see if the added fertilizer was helpful.

Watch for worms or beetles, and treat as you would any other vegetable.

You can harvest in September. Earlier harvest gives smaller potatoes...but you may not be able to resist grubbing out a few for a late summer meal! Just carefully reach into the soil and pull out a few. The plant will keep growing.

Place the harvested potatoes in an open container in a building. Let them air dry for a week or more. This helps toughen the potato skin so it will keep longer. After this, the potatoes can be stored in a cool room but not a refrigerator.

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