

## Growing Sweet Potatoes

By George Bushell

To grow sweet potatoes, you need rooted slips. If you have sweet potatoes, they can be half-covered in warm water any time in March and they will produce vines that can be cut into 6 to 7 inch slips (or shorter if the vines are not long enough). These slips should also be placed in water to cover the bottom two leaves on each slip for a week before planting outdoors so they will start small roots at the submerged leaf node. Plant outdoors toward the end of May or the beginning of June when the weather is warm. Build a raised bed and create small depressions in the bed about 18 to 24 inches apart. Next, cover the entire bed with clear plastic (to keep the soil warm as sweet potatoes are a heat loving sub-tropical member of the morning glory family) and cut a 6 inch X in the plastic over each depression. Punch a 2 or 3 inch diameter hole in the centre of each depression (about 4 - 6 inches deep), place a slip in each hole, fill the holes with soil, add a little compost to the surface of the depression, and water daily for a week if the weather is hot and dry.

Dig your sweet potatoes in early September before it turns cool. Sweet potatoes store very well and will easily last to March when you can start your next supply of slips. For eating, the best flavour is obtained by "curing" the roots at a temperature of about 25-30 degrees Celsius for a week after they are harvested (I place my roots in the baskets of my old chest freezer that I have converted to a "cold room" and install a lighted 60 watt bulb in the bottom to keep the temperature at 25-30 degrees). While it is not necessary to cure your roots, if you do, be sure to keep a few roots aside for next year's slip production (i.e., do not heat them). Sweet potatoes keep best over the winter on the floor of a basement at about 15 to 17 degrees Celsius.

Georgia Jet sweet potatoes are the best variety to grow this far north. To start growing sweet potatoes, you can order slips that will be mailed to you around the end of May from the supplier shown below (order in February as they are usually sold out by sometime in March):

Mapple Farm  
129 Beech Hill Rd.,  
Weldon, NB E4H 4N5  
506-734-3361  
[wingate@nbnet.nb.ca](mailto:wingate@nbnet.nb.ca).

To read more gardening articles by George Bushell, you can visit his web site at <http://georgebushell.com/6301.html>.