



Growing Sweetpotatoes in Western Washington

Curing and Storage

Laura Schulz, Laurel Moulton, Samantha Grieger,
Jordan White, Srijana Shrestha and Carol Miles



WASHINGTON STATE
UNIVERSITY

Contents

Curing and Storage.	1
Purpose of Curing.	1
Preparing Roots for Curing	1
Curing Conditions	1
Storage	2
References	2

Growing Sweetpotatoes in Western Washington: Curing and Storage

🔗 vegetables.wsu.edu/sweetpotato/

Published May 2025

Authors: Laura Schulz¹, Laurel Moulton², Samantha Grieger², Jordan White¹, Srijana Shrestha³, Carol Miles¹

¹Washington State University Northwestern Washington Research and Extension Center, ²Washington State University Extension, ³Oregon State University Extension

The information in this publication is based upon work that is supported by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Institute of Food and Agriculture, under award number 2022-38640-37490 through the Western Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education Program under project number SW23951, and Hatch Project WNP0010 Accession 7005372. Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the author(s) and should not be construed to represent any official USDA or U.S. Government determination or policy, and are not meant to endorse any businesses or detract from any not listed.

Extension programs and policies are consistent with federal and state laws and regulations on nondiscrimination regarding race, sex, religion, age, color, creed, national or ethnic origin; physical, mental, or sensory disability; marital status, sexual orientation, or status as a Vietnam-era or disabled veteran. Evidence of noncompliance may be reported through [your local Extension office](#).

Curing and Storage

Purpose of 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. Without curing, sweetpotatoes have a shelf life of only a few weeks post-harvest. In contrast, properly cured sweetpotatoes may be stored for 12 months or more. During curing, a protective cork layer is formed over the root surface, and suberin, a waxy material, is produced by the root's outer cells and is deposited on the root surface. The cork layer and suberin combined act as a barrier to microorganisms and excessive moisture loss. Curing improves flavor as starch is converted to sugar. In regions where temperatures are 70-85 °F during the harvest period, curing may not be needed for flavor enhancement.

Preparing Roots for Curing

Begin curing roots as soon as possible after harvest, ideally the same day. Brush off excess soil but do not wash sweetpotato roots after harvest. Ideally cure and store unwashed roots and only wash roots right before selling or eating them. If you must wash roots prior to curing, wash immediately after harvest and let the skin dry completely in a shady location before beginning curing. Washing may damage the skin and make the roots more susceptible to pathogens, but if the roots are properly cured, the skin will heal, and storage life is typically only slightly less than unwashed cured roots.

Curing Conditions

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. Ventilation is needed to ensure moisture does not accumulate on root surfaces as this will lead to mold and rotting. For a small number of roots, place kraft paper on top of storage crates to absorb moisture if needed.

Closely monitor the heating element in the curing chamber or room to ensure the space is heated evenly and sweetpotatoes, especially those closest to the heater, are not overheated. Sweetpotatoes will be damaged if placed too close to a heating element or if the curing chamber or room gets too hot. Sweetpotato curing conditions are like those used for winter squash, and some farmers in western Washington have had success curing the two crops together in a greenhouse or insulated room.

Properly cured sweetpotatoes will feel firm, do not skin easily, have healed-over wounds, and taste sweet (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Sweetpotato roots skin easily before curing (left), and sweetpotato root wound healed over after proper curing (right).

A small curing chamber can be constructed using a PVC pipe frame covered with clear plastic with a humidifier placed inside (Figure 2). Sweetpotatoes can also be cured in a small room with a space heater and humidifier (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Curing chamber (left) and room (right).

Storage

After curing is complete, store sweetpotatoes at 55-60 °F, 80-90% relative humidity. Storage can be done in the same room used for curing, with the heater turned to low or off. Below 55 °F, chilling injury occurs, while sprouting occurs above 60 °F. Exposure to hot, dry conditions during storage can increase moisture loss and may cause pithiness (dry, fibrous flesh, sometimes with visible air spaces) in some cultivars (Woolfe 1992). Properly cured sweetpotatoes can be stored for 6 to 12 months or more. At home, wrap cured sweetpotatoes in newspaper or a paper bag and store in a cool closet or unheated storage room or garage.

References

1. Woolfe, J. 1992 Sweet potato: An untapped food resource. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, Great Britain.