

NEWS RELEASE



Prepare Louisiana Sweet Potato Baby Food to Ensure a Great, Healthy Start

BATON ROUGE, La.— Louisiana sweet potatoes are a win-win option when it comes to making homemade baby food because you'll love their nutritional value, and your baby will love the naturally sweet taste.

Unlike the firm, dry and stringy texture of sweet potatoes produced in northern states, Louisiana sweet potatoes, also called yams, have a soft, moist consistency, making them perfect for pureeing. They also have a thick, dark orange skin with a smooth, naturally sweet flesh, compared to the less-sweet, pale-colored northern sweet potatoes.

And not only are Louisiana yams delicious; they are at the top of the nutrition list because they contain large amounts of essential nutrients such as Vitamin A, calcium, B6, iron, beta-carotene, potassium, fiber, Vitamin E, manganese and folate. By preparing your own sweet potato baby food, you will be assured of knowing exactly what your baby is consuming.

When to feed your baby sweet potatoes:

Sweet potatoes are an excellent first-food option, as well as an early solid-food choice because they are highly palatable and have a high fiber content that helps babies' digestive tracts.

- **4 to 6 months.** Many pediatric resources suggest creamy foods at this stage, such as pureed sweet potatoes, a great first food that is easy to digest and full of vitamins, minerals and other nutrients a growing baby needs.
- **6 to 8 months.** After 6 months, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends starting your baby on soft solids. You may begin introducing soft finger foods to your infant to encourage self-feeding. Soft baked yam dices make a great option for your little one.
- **8 to 10 months.** You should try to expand your baby's palate with new flavors and combinations, still serving small, soft-cooked solids or food mashed with a fork or masher. Experiment with new spices when preparing sweet potatoes, such as a bit of nutmeg, brown sugar and cinnamon. Also try mixing up vegetable and fruit medleys with boiled cubed sweet potatoes, such as soft, cooked apple cubes or boiled squash dices.

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How to prepare Louisiana sweet potato baby food:

- **Baking.** Pre-heat oven to 375°, wash and poke holes in the sweet potato with a fork, wrap it in aluminum foil, and bake for about 45 minutes until soft. Cool briefly, split the skin, scoop out the soft flesh and puree the sweet potato until it reaches desired baby-food consistency.
- **Boiling.** Peel and cut the sweet potato into chunks. Use just enough water to cover the potato, cover the pot and bring to a boil. Reduce the heat, simmer until tender, drain, cool briefly and puree to desired consistency.
- **Steaming.** Place peeled sweet potato cubes on steamer rack over a pan containing about an inch of water. Cover the pan, and bring the water to a boil. Reduce the heat and steam for 10 to 12 minutes. Cool briefly, and puree to desired consistency.
- **Microwaving.** Pierce the sweet potato with a fork, place on a paper towel and microwave on high for about 5 minutes. Allow the sweet potato to stand for 5 more minutes for it to continue to cook and soften. Split the skin, scoop out the soft flesh and puree to desired consistency.
- **Fun tip for a barbecue!** When grilling for a party, wrap a sweet potato tightly in foil, place it in coals to cook for about 45 minutes, cool and puree. Now your baby will be able to join the party!

Because Louisiana sweet potatoes freeze very well, you can cook your baby food in advance and use it as needed, which is always a big help for busy parents. A popular and easy method of freezing baby food is by using ice-cube trays. Simply clean a regular ice-cube tray, spoon pureed baby food into each section, cover the tray with food-safe plastic wrap, and place the tray into the freezer. After the cubes are frozen, place them in zipper plastic bags and keep in your freezer, using them as needed. At first, one sweet potato cube per meal should be the perfect amount for your baby, but as he or she grows, you may want to use two. These perfectly sized portions make preparing meals for your baby so easy and convenient. Try making different baby food flavors by mixing fruit and vegetable cubes, such as cubed pureed apple with cubed pureed sweet potato.

Selecting and storing sweet potatoes:

Sweet potatoes are one of the 15 foods least contaminated with pesticides, making purchasing fresh Louisiana sweet potatoes a great choice for your baby's food. Canned and frozen Louisiana yams, which are already cooked, are also available year round, and nutritionally, they are a comparable alternative to fresh yams. When selecting fresh sweet potatoes, make sure they are not bruised and do not have soft, brown spots. Do not refrigerate uncooked sweet potatoes; rather, keep them in a cool, dry area. Once cooked, sweet potatoes may be kept in the refrigerator for only about 2 to 3 days.

Preparing your own sweet potato baby food is so easy and will ensure the best possible physical and mental start for your baby. Because Louisiana sweet potatoes are extremely versatile, they make a tasty combination with many types of foods. Try mixing sweet potatoes with apples, peaches, baby cereal (oatmeal, rice, barley), carrots, green beans, pumpkin, zucchini, or peas.

The Louisiana Sweet Potato Commission represents bankers, growers, shippers, and processors, with the mission of promoting the consumption of sweet potatoes, in particular Louisiana sweet potatoes, by educating consumers on the yam's many nutritional attributes and its amazing versatility in popular, delicious recipes. For more information, visit www.sweetpotato.org, and check out Louisiana Yams' Facebook fan page, www.facebook.com/louisianayams.

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