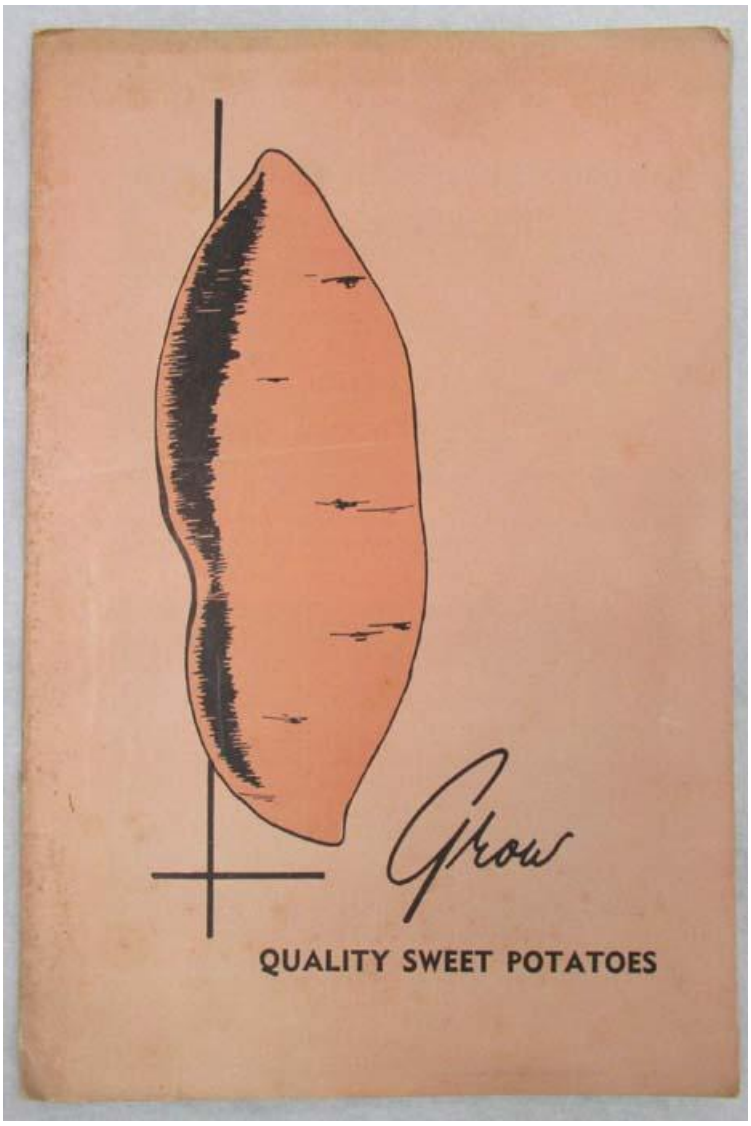
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Vegetable, Sweet Potato [1]



"Grow Quality Sweet Potatoes", April 1950, N.C. Agricultural Extension Service Circular No. 353. From the collections of the North Carolina Museum of History. Used courtesy of the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources. [2]

State Vegetable of North Carolina: Sweet Potato

by Amy Kemp and Kelly Agan, 2017.
NC Government & Heritage Library

See also: North Carolina State Symbols and Official Adoptions main page [3]

The sweet potato was officially designated the State Vegetable by the General Assembly of 1995. (*Session Laws*, 1995, c. 521 [4]).

Selection as State Vegetable

Early discussions and bills for a State Vegetable occured in the 1980's and proposed collards and corn, however, none of these motions passed. In the 1990's, fourth grade students at Elvie Street School in Wilson, North Carolina petitioned the North Carolina General Assembly for the establishment of the sweet potato (*Ipomoea batatas*) as the Official State Vegetable after being inspired by a visit from their local congressman, Representative Gene Arnold. With the support of their parents and community they began a letter writing campaign to the state legislature requesting the adoption. In the summer of 1995, after two years of work, the bill was passed.

About the Sweet Potato

The sweet potato was grown in North Carolina by the Native Americans long before the European colonization of North America. Some scientist believe that sweet potatoes might have even been a food source for the dinosaurs.

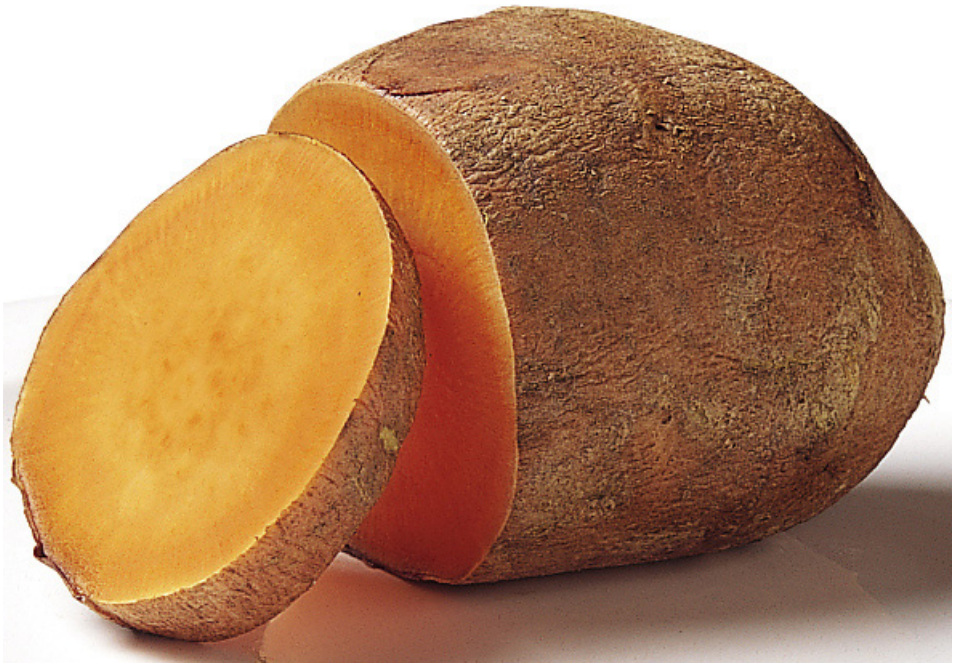
North Carolina is the number one state in sweet potato production, growing nearly half of the country's sweet potatoes. Wilson and Johnston counties are the top producers, but there are more than 60,000 acres spread throughout the state. The majority of production is located in the coastal plain because of its sandy soil and temperate climate.

Surprisingly, the sweet potato is not at all related to the potato. The sweet potato belongs to the root family, while the potato is a tuber. Sweet potatoes are frequently confused with yams, though these are also two distinctly different vegetables. While sweet potatoes are indigenous to North America, the yam comes from West Africa and Asia. According to legend, the early enslaved Africans in America saw similarities between the sweet potato and the vegetable of their homeland and introduced the word "yam." Three West African languages have words that may be the origin of the word "yam." These words, the Fulani and Wolof word *nyami* and the Twi word *anyinam,* all mean "to eat." Today, most 'yams' marketed in the United States are actually sweet potatoes.

There are hundreds of different varieties of sweet potato. They are usually orange, but can also be white, purple, or even deep red. All have an oblong body with tapered ends. The Covington, a very common type of Sweet potato, originated in North Carolina. It has rose colored skin, sweet orange flesh, and is popular for mashing and roasting. Other varieties from North Carolina include the Jewel, the Carolina Ruby, and the Porto Rico 198.

Sweet potatoes are high in vitamins A and C and low in fat. They have a low glycemic index, which makes them a good source of nutrients for diabetics. They are also very high in potassium, magnesium, and phosphorus.

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100 North Carolina Icons [13]
State Symbols [14]
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