

This Root Crop Is Filled With Antioxidants and Nutrients

It may look like a potato, but this tuber has deep orange flesh that offers numerous antioxidants and nutrients, making it a great pet treat. Learn more about its benefits and how you can offer it to your pet here.

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STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- Cooked, unseasoned sweet potatoes are safe for pets. They're a healthy source of various nutrients that may help promote different aspects of your pet's well-being
- Sweet potatoes contain phytochemicals that exhibit "multifaceted actions" such as antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, immunomodulatory, antiulcer and anticancer benefits
- The amount of phytochemicals in sweet potato depends on its variety. Purple varieties have higher amounts of anthocyanin, whereas orange ones contain more beta-carotene
- When feeding your pet sweet potato as a snack, make sure that you cook it well. Do not feed your pet raw sweet potatoes because they're difficult to digest

Sweet potatoes are a type of root vegetable that have a mildly sweet flavor and starchy texture. They're a popular ingredient in a variety of human dishes, from soups and casseroles to pasta dishes and pies.¹

Cooked sweet potatoes are safe for pets to consume and can be served as a healthy treat, constituting less than 10% of your pet's daily caloric intake, or as an ingredient in your pet's nutritionally balanced homemade meal. Read on to learn more about this root vegetable and how it may benefit your pet's health.

Are Sweet Potatoes and Yams the Same?

Before we get into the benefits of sweet potatoes, let's clear up the confusion between this root vegetable and yams. The terms "sweet potatoes" and "yams" are often used interchangeably, but they are actually two completely different crops. While sweet potatoes are from the morning glory family of plants, yams are related to lilies.²

According to The Spruce Eats, the confusion began when enslaved Africans in America called sweet potatoes "yam" because they resembled yams in Africa. Louisiana growers then used this name to distinguish their sweet potato crops from competitors, and the name has stuck since. The dark-skinned, purple- or orange-fleshed root crop that most Americans often refer to as yams nowadays is likely a sweet potato.^{3,4}

True yams can also be shared with pets,⁵ but they are not commonly found in supermarkets in the U.S. Sweet potatoes, however, are widely available, but they're best sourced from your local farmers market, preferably spray-free or organic.

Which State Produces the Most Sweet Potatoes?



Since 1971, North Carolina has held the No. 1 spot for the state with the largest sweet potato yield, accounting for approximately 60% of all the sweet potatoes grown in the U.S.⁶

Sweet Potatoes Are Rich in Phytochemicals

Sweet potatoes are a healthy source of various nutrients that may help promote different aspects of your pet's well-being — among those are beneficial phytochemicals. According to an article published in the Tropical Journal of Pharmaceutical Research, sweet potatoes contain phytochemicals that exhibit "multifaceted actions" such as antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, antimicrobial, immunomodulatory, antiulcer and anticancer properties.⁷

"Some of the major bioactive compounds in sweet potatoes include flavonoids, terpenoids, tannins, saponins, and phenolic acids, among others."⁸

The amount of phytochemicals in sweet potato depends on its variety. Purple varieties have higher amounts of anthocyanin, whereas orange varieties contain more beta-carotene.⁹

More on Sweet Potatoes' Beta-Carotene Content

One tablespoon serving of sweet potato offers 1.94 milligrams (mg) of beta-carotene,¹⁰ a powerful antioxidant that may help protect your pet against oxidative damage, reducing their risk for chronic diseases like cancer, obesity and heart disease.¹¹ It may also help lower your pet's risk for cognitive dysfunction,¹² as well as skin and eye problems.¹³

Moreover, beta-carotene is an immune system modulator.¹⁴ A study published in the Journal of Nutrition analyzed the effects of beta-carotene on the immune response of dogs and found that it may help improve "cell-mediated and humoral immune responses."¹⁵ The humoral immune response is responsible for destroying extracellular microorganisms and inhibiting intracellular infections from spreading.¹⁶

The Purple Variety Is Extra Beneficial for Your Pet

Purple sweet potatoes can also provide antioxidant benefits. According to an article in Molecules, the anthocyanin content of purple sweet potato can be compared to blueberries, blackberries and cranberries, which are known for their free radical-fighting properties.¹⁷

Animal studies have shown that this powerful antioxidant may help inhibit cancer cell growth and induce apoptosis. Anthocyanins also possess antimicrobial and anti-inflammatory properties, and may help improve visual, cardiovascular and neurological health.^{18,19}



Sweet Potato Fun Facts



Sweet potatoes are ancient crops that are believed to be native to Central and South America. The earliest records of sweet potatoes date back to 750 BCE in Peru, but archeological evidence shows that it wasn't until 2500 to 1850 BCE that people started cultivating this root crop.²⁰



Sweet Potatoes Also Provide Vitamin C and Fiber

Sweet potatoes contain approximately 2.63 mg of vitamin C per 1-tablespoon serving.²¹ This vitamin may help protect your animal companion against free radical damage, helping boost their immune health and reducing their risk for cognitive decline.²² It also plays an important role in metabolism and maintaining healthy skin, bones and blood vessels.²³

Sweet potatoes also contain 0.51 grams of dietary fiber for every 1-tablespoon serving,²⁴ which may help improve your pet's immune health by promoting healthy gut microflora. Fiber also helps lower your pet's risk for gastrointestinal problems by stimulating motility and improving bowel transit time.^{25,26} However, make sure not to feed your pet too much of this root crop since they don't need a large amount of fiber in their diet to mimic the roughage that their ancestors obtained from the wild.

Be Wary of Sweet Potato Pet Treats From Foreign Countries

According to the FDA, commercial dehydrated sweet potato treats and chews, especially those that were imported from China, have been linked to gastrointestinal problems and kidney disease, particularly Fanconi syndrome, which is normally a rare hereditary condition in certain dog breeds.²⁷

These adverse effects may be caused by chemical contamination. In fact, one brand of sweet potato pet treats from China was found to be contaminated with phorate, a highly toxic pesticide.²⁸ While an import alert was issued against this particular brand,²⁹ you should still be vigilant about where your pet's food and treats come from. To make sure that you're giving your pet safe treats, it's best to make your own treats at home, or buy from a pet food or treat manufacturer you trust, in terms of sourcing.

Organic Sweet Potatoes Are Your Safest Choice

If you want sweet potatoes to be a part of your pet's nutritionally balanced homemade diet, be sure to choose organic, spray-free options to avoid feeding your pet pesticides and chemical fertilizers commonly found in conventionally grown fruits and vegetables. You can often find organic sweet potatoes from your local farmers market.

Tips for Feeding Sweet Potatoes to Your Pets

Misinformation about many healthy fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds abounds on the internet. This is because websites have labeled all risks (such as the risk of overconsumption causing gastrointestinal issues, or choking on too large of pieces or pits) as "toxicities," which isn't true but has managed to confuse millions of pet lovers, nonetheless.

In the case of sweet potatoes, some pet parents are concerned that they may cause stomach upset. The risk of GI upset from consuming this raw vegetable is eliminated by cooking them. You can prepare this root vegetable by steaming (the most nutritious option), boiling or baking. Serve cooked sweet potato plain and avoid using sugar, spices, seasonings and other additives.³⁰ Cooked sweet potatoes can also be dehydrated to create an enticing chew.

Remember that while sweet potatoes are loaded with healthy nutrients, they're also high in carbohydrates, containing 3.63 grams per 1-tablespoon serving.³¹ Healthy treats, including sweet potato chews, should make up less than 10% of your pet's daily caloric intake. If you're using sweet potato as an ingredient in your pet's balanced meal, follow a nutritionally complete recipe.



Sweet Potatoes vs. White Potatoes: What's the Difference?

Despite the name, sweet potatoes are not related to regular white potatoes. White potatoes belong to the nightshade family (Solanaceae)³² and are higher in carbohydrates, containing 20 grams per 100-gram serving, while sweet potatoes, as mentioned above, belong to the morning glory family (Convolvulaceae)³³ and only have 17.7 grams.

Sweet potatoes are also considered the healthier of the two because they're richer in beta-carotene,³⁴ containing 9,440 micrograms per 100-gram serving, as opposed to regular potatoes' 1 microgram.³⁵



Let Your Pet Enjoy a Bite of Sweet Potatoes With This Recipe

Cooked sweet potatoes make a healthy and versatile treat or an addition to your pet's nutritionally balanced homemade diet. If you've never given your pet sweet potatoes, here's an easy and delicious treat you can make at home:

Sweet Potato Muffins or Cookies

Ingredients:

- 🐾 1 large sweet potato, peeled, cooked and mashed
- 🐾 3 eggs
- 🐾 3/4 cup unsweetened applesauce
- 🐾 1 1/3 cups coconut flour
- 🐾 1 banana, mashed
- 🐾 1/4 cup kefir
- 🐾 1/2 teaspoon ginger (optional)
- 🐾 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon (optional)

Procedure:

1. Mix all the ingredients together. Fill greased muffin pans or form into small 1- to 2-inch cookies (It's your choice!).
2. Bake at 300 degrees Fahrenheit for 40 minutes to make nine large muffins, 20 minutes for mini muffins or 30 minutes for cookies.
3. Let cool before serving to your pets.

Store extras in the freezer or refrigerator and consume within one week. If stored in the freezer, they can stay fresh for up to three months.

Sources and References

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