HARVEST OF THE MONTH

A Farm to Early Care and Education Activity Toolkit for Georgia Early Care Providers

SENSATIONAL SWEET POTATOES

Prepared by Diana Myers, MS, RD
INTRODUCTION

Research tells us that a young child’s food preferences develop within the first few years of life as an infant transitions from eating one food to a multitude of foods with varying flavor profiles. Many young children spend significant time in early care centers and family homes. These providers have the ability to influence the dietary preferences of young children in a healthy, engaging, and positive way. These four Harvest of the Month (HOTM) Kits were created to be used in early care and education settings with three to five-year olds.

Each Kit focuses on a locally grown Georgia fruit or vegetable and includes:

- Fun facts and information about the fruit or vegetable.
- A kid friendly recipe
- Nutrition activity linked to the Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards (GELDS)
- Children’s literature connections

The kits are aligned with the Georgia Department of Education’s K-12 Harvest of the Month calendar and Quality Care for Children’s Harvest of the Month calendar for early care providers. The purpose of these kits is to provide a GELDS aligned, hands-on learning experience that enhances children’s knowledge of fruits and vegetables through activities, literature connections, taste testing, and recipe creation.

These HOTM kits were created by Diana Myers, MS, RD as part of a Master’s capstone project. Each kit was tested at Atlanta area early care and education centers under the guidance of Georgia Organics and Quality Care for Children.

Capstone Advisory Committee
Abbie King Chaddick, MS, RD
Gina Cook
Erin Croom, MS
Jessica Todd, MS, RD, LD

Photography by Linden Tree Photography and Diana Myers, MS, RD
Sensational Sweet Potatoes

DID YOU KNOW?

- Sweet potatoes were grown in Peru as early as 750 BC.[1]
  
  **Fun tip:**
  Show children where Peru is on a map.

- Sweet potatoes are packed with nutrition! They are high sources of fiber, potassium, and vitamins A and C.
  - Fiber keeps you full and going to the bathroom regularly.
  - Potassium is important in keeping us alive! It helps to keep your heart, muscles, and kidneys strong and healthy.
  - Vitamin A keeps our eyes, skin, teeth, and bones happy and healthy.
  - Vitamin C helps to keep germs away, keeps us from getting sick and heals our bumps and scratches.
  
  **Fun tip:**
  Show children where the heart, muscles, and kidneys are on/in the body.

- Sweet potatoes are the official state vegetable of North Carolina and Louisiana.
  
  **Fun tip:**
  Show children where North Carolina and Louisiana are on a map.

- It takes about 90 to 120 days to grow sweet potatoes.
  
  **Fun tip:**
  Show children the amount of days on a calendar to help put this length of time from beginning to harvest into perspective.

- In February, we celebrate National Sweet Potato Month!
  
  **Fun tip:**
  Show the children February on the calendar.

References:
Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards:

**CLL2** – The child will acquire vocabulary introduced in conversations, activities, stories, and/or books.

**CLL5** – The child will acquire meaning from a variety of materials read to him/her.

![Book Options](image)

**SWEET POTATO-THEMED CHILDREN’S BOOKS**

Little Sweet Potato by Amy Beth Bloom

The Enormous Potato by Aubrey Davis

From Eye to Potato by Ellen Weiss

Jamie O’Rourke and the Big Potato by Tomie dePaola

The Vegetables We Eat by Gail Gibbons

The Gigantic Sweet Potato by Dianne De Las Casas

Rhino, Rhino Sweet Potato by Francine Prose

Sweet Potato Pie by Kathleen D. Lindsey
Sensational Sweet Potatoes

SWEET POTATO PLAY DOUGH ACTIVITY

Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards:

CD-CR2 – The child will create and explore visual art forms to develop artistic expression.

PDM5 – The child will demonstrate gross motor skills.

Adapted from Healthy Mama Info

Ingredients

- Two and a 1/2 cups flour ($3)
- 1/2 cup salt ($1)
- One Tbsp. cream of tartar ($4)
- Two Tbsps. canola oil ($2)
- 3/4 cup water
- One medium sweet potato ($1.50/pound)

Supplies

- Three-quart saucepan ($17)
- Large spoon ($6)
- Induction burner ($50)
- Medium bowl ($12/two-count)
- Paper bowls ($2.50/42-count)
- Plastic forks ($2/100-count)

Instructions

1. Pierce the sweet potato with a fork five times and microwave for five to seven minutes while rotating it halfway through.
2. Combine two cups of flour, salt, cream of tartar, oil and water in a pot on the stovetop or induction burner.
3. Mix well and put on medium-high heat, stirring continuously.
4. When the dough forms a ball in the middle of the pot, turn the heat off and take the dough ball out of the pot and into a medium bowl to let cool.
5. Once cooled, knead the dough ball.
6. Scoop out the insides of the sweet potato into a small bowl and mash with a fork.
7. Add a 1/2 cup of flour slowly to the sweet potato and mix well.
8. Combine the mashed sweet potato with the dough ball and knead again.
9. Once combined and kneaded, the play dough is ready to enjoy with the children!

Tips

- If the dough ball becomes too sticky when adding the sweet potato, add extra flour.
- Include children in the process of making the play dough by having them each help knead the dough ball and mash the sweet potato.
- Draw or print out outlines of sweet potatoes for children to form a sweet potato shaped play dough on top of the design.
SPROUTING SWEET POTATOES ACTIVITY

Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards:

**CD-SC3**  – The child will demonstrate knowledge related to living things and their environments.

*Adapted from Pre-K Pages: Science for Kids*

### Supplies
- Knife ($15)
- Cutting board ($7)
- Sweet potato ($1.50/pound)
- Clear cup ($1)
- Water
- Toothpicks ($2)
- Sunny windowsill

### Instructions
1. Use a knife to cut the sweet potato in half width wise on a cutting board.
2. Fill the clear cup with water.
3. Insert four toothpicks into the middle of the sweet potato half. There should be enough room for two inches of the sweet potato to be immersed in water.
4. Set the sweet potato in the cup. The toothpicks should hold the sweet potato at the top of the cup while the bottom part is submerged in the water.
5. Set the sweet potato in a sunny windowsill.
6. Monitor water amounts in the cup to ensure that the sweet potato is always partly submerged in the water.
7. On a daily basis, observe the changes of the sweet potato with the children. You will begin to see roots growing down into the water over time from the bottom cut of the sweet potato. You will also see shoots with leaves growing from the top; these shoots are called slips.

### Tips
- After putting the sweet potato in the windowsill on day one, ask the children their thoughts on what they think will happen.
- Create a daily log and spend time with the children each day to observe and discuss the changes.
- Explore what is happening with the children. The sweet potato stays hydrated by being in the water on the bottom half and the top half soaks in the air and sunlight needed for growth.
- If you have a school garden, you can plant the slips from the sweet potatoes! To do this, carefully twist each of the slips off of the sweet potato. Place the bottom of the slips in water with the leaves above the water; watch closely as roots begin to form off of the bottom of the slips within a couple of days. Once the roots grow to about one inch, you may plant them in loose, well-drained soil. Plant each slip in a hole about four inches down and one foot apart from each other. Water them and watch them grow! In doing this type of farm to early care experience, the children will begin to form a connection between how their food grows and where it comes from.

### Fun tip:
Show students this growth by sitting on the ground and slowly rising up with your arms in the air to reach the sunlight. Ask the children what they need to grow big and strong like a sweet potato.
Sensational Sweet Potatoes

RAW AND BAKED SWEET POTATO FRIES

Georgia Early Learning and Development Standards:

PDM2 – The child will participate in activities related to nutrition.
PDM4 – The child will use senses (sight, touch, hear, smell, taste) to explore the environment and process information.
PDM5 – The child will demonstrate gross motor skills.
PDM6 – The child will demonstrate fine motor skills.

Below, you will find three ways of taste testing sweet potatoes. If you have all of the supplies, consider making all of these recipes and introducing children to raw sweet potatoes and cooked sweet potatoes in a variety of ways. This is an opportunity to teach children that fruits and vegetables taste and feel differently when they are cooked versus raw. Encourage them to keep an open mind as each recipe tastes different and unique!

The simplest way to taste test sweet potatoes is raw. Sweet potatoes cut into thin slices are an opportunity to share them in their most basic way. It is just as important to teach children to eat fruits and vegetables raw as it is to teach them to eat them cooked. Sweet potato fries are another great way to provide a healthier alternative and connect children to something they recognize. Lastly, savory mashed sweet potatoes will teach the children a unique spin on traditional mashed potatoes. They may even ask their parents to make this for the holidays! Refer to the Buying Local Guide for tips on buying local sweet potatoes.

Raw Sweet Potato Fries:
Taste testing serving size: one sweet potato strip
Servings per sweet potato: About 30 servings

Baked Sweet Potato Fries:
Taste testing serving size: two sweet potato fries
Servings per recipe: About 30 servings

Ingredients

• Three sweet potatoes ($1.50/pound)
• Two Tbsp. canola oil ($2)
• 1/2 tsp. garlic powder ($1.50)
• 1/2 tsp. paprika
• 1/8 tsp. salt ($1)

Tips for Tasting

• Stimulate conversation during taste tests by asking the children about the sweet potatoes.

Examples of questions include:

What color are the sweet potatoes?
Do they make a sound when you bite into them?
What do they smell like?
Do they remind you of anything that you’ve tried before?
Have they tried sweet potatoes before?
Would they try them again?

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T each children how to give respectful responses, even if they don’t like what they tried. “Don’t yuck my yum!” is a great way of teaching children that they may not like it, but their friends might. Remember, it can take a child multiple times of exposure before they like a new food.

If you have an herb garden at the school or are feeling creative, try making different seasonings to put on the fries using different herbs.

Supplies

- Knife ($15)
- Cutting board ($7)
- Paper plates ($2/100-count)

Preparation

- Slice one sweet potato into 1/4 inch thick strips for the raw sweet potato taste test.
- Slice two sweet potatoes into 1/2 inch thick strips for the sweet potato fries taste test.
- Measure out the oil, garlic powder, paprika, and salt.

Instructions

1. Pre-heat the oven to 425 degrees Fahrenheit or the toaster oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit.
2. Have all adults and children wash their hands thoroughly before cooking and taste testing.
3. Pass out one 1/4 inch thick raw sweet potato strip to each child to taste test prior to preparing the sweet potato fries. 
   * Note: Raw sweet potatoes may serve as a choking hazard if not cut thin enough. If you are unsure if your raw sweet potato strips are small enough, please skip the raw sweet potato taste test.
4. After taste testing the sweet potatoes raw, have five child volunteers help with pouring ingredients into the bowl, including sweet potatoes, oil, garlic powder, paprika, and salt.
5. Mix the seasonings with the sweet potatoes so that they are combined evenly.
6. Place sweet potato strips on a baking sheet for the oven or toaster oven.
7. Bake the sweet potato fries for 15 minutes. After 15 minutes, take the baking sheet out, flip the fries and put back in the oven or toaster oven.
8. Bake for another 10 minutes or until crispy.
9. Take the baking sheet of sweet potato strips out of the oven or toaster oven and let cool. Make sure the baking sheet is not able to be reached by the children.
10. As a class, taste the sweet potato fries together.
Sensational Sweet Potatoes

SAVORY MASHED POTATOES

Adapted from Cookie + Kate
Recipe makes about two cups
Taste testing serving size: two Tbsp.
Servings per recipe: About 16 servings.

Ingredients

• Two sweet potatoes ($1.50/pound)
• Two Tbsp. melted butter ($4)
• Two Tbsp. plain Greek yogurt ($1)
• 1/3 cup fresh parsley, torn ($1)
• 1/3 cup green onions, minced ($1)
• Salt & pepper, to taste ($3)
• One clove garlic, minced ($2)

Supplies

• Cutting board ($7)
• Knife ($15)
• Medium bowl ($12/two-count)
• Potato masher ($5)
• Large spoon ($6)
• Measuring cups & spoons ($10)
• Wavy cutters ($6/can be purchased on Amazon)
• Paper plates ($5/100-count)
• Plastic forks ($2/100-count)

Preparation

• Wash, dry and poke holes with a fork into the sweet potatoes.
• Microwave sweet potatoes for 10-15 minutes, until tender.
• Let the sweet potatoes cool for one hour before continuing with the recipe.
• Mince the garlic.
• Measure out the butter, Greek yogurt, salt, pepper, and garlic.

Tips

• Have one child at a time help with measurements and pouring; this helps with classroom management.
• Stimulate conversation by asking the children questions about senses, past experiences, and thoughts.

Examples of questions include:

Have you ever mashed sweet potatoes?
Have you ever eaten sweet potatoes?
If so, when have you eaten sweet potatoes?
Do they taste sweet or salty?
Would you try them again?
What do they feel like in your mouth?
What do they smell like?
What do they look like?

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1. Have all adults and children wash their hands thoroughly before cooking and taste testing.
2. Scoop out the insides of the cooked and cooled sweet potatoes into a medium bowl.
3. Pass out parsley and have the children tear it into little pieces.
4. Pass out the wavy cutters and the green onions.
5. Have the children cut the green onions into small pieces using the wavy cutters. Note: Pre-chop if wavy cutters are not available.
6. Have seven child volunteers individually come up and add the butter, Greek yogurt, parsley, green onion, garlic, salt and pepper to the bowl.
7. Give each child a chance to use the potato masher to mash the potatoes until smooth.
8. Serve and enjoy!
Buying Local Guide

WHY BUY LOCAL FOOD?

• Procuring items from local farms will help to support the local economy and create jobs.
• When produce doesn’t have to travel far, it is able to be harvested closer to its peak ripeness causing it to taste better and fresher.
• With less travel time and a sooner harvest date, produce has longer shelf life which helps to reduce waste.
• Children will begin to develop a connection surrounding the origins of their food.

HOW DO I BUY LOCAL FOOD?

• Reach out to your food distributor to ask for local foods.
• Connect with nearby farmers to purchase directly from their farm. You can find farms near you at www.localharvest.org
• Find nearby farmers markets to purchase local produce from. Visit www.georgiaorganics.org/good-food-guide/ to find a farmers market near you.
• Reach out to local purchasing agencies on procuring local produce.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR BUYING LOCAL FOOD

• The Common Market (www.thecommonmarket.org)
• Farm’d (www.farmd.com)
• Fresh Harvest (www.freshharvestga.com)
• Georgia Grown of the Georgia Department of Agriculture (www.georgiagrown.com/)
• The Turnip Truck (www.turniptruckga.com)