VEGETABLES · A SUNNY OUTDOOR PATIO WITH A LONG, WARM GROWING SEASON

Let's grow sweet potatoes.

Ipomoea batatas

This plan is for **Vardaman Bush edible sweet potato**

One leafy slip. A big pot. A harvest to dig for.

20-gallon container **1 rooted slip**

Before you start

Plant after frost danger when mix reaches at least 65°F; this approximately 110-day variety needs a long warm season. Harvest before frost.

By jennyzhuang

Sources checked September 25, 2026 View sources

LIGHT

Lots of sun

Give it at least 6 hours of direct sun; more is welcome.

WATER

Steady moisture

Keep a new slip moist; later, water as the top inch dries.

FEEDING

Moderate feeding

Use the starter nutrients first; avoid extra high-nitrogen feeds.

BEFORE YOU START

Your little kit.

- ✓ One 20-gallon grow bag or draining container, roughly 20 inches wide and at least 15 inches deep
- ✓ Fresh potting mix, a watering can, and room for vines to spread
- ✓ 1 healthy rooted Vardaman Bush slip from an edible-crop supplier

THE SOIL

Miracle-Gro Organic Potting Mix (US, SKU 78951430). Contains starter nutrients; follow the feeding instructions on your actual bag.

Start with what's on this list. Add plant food only when the feeding section says it's needed.

YOUR SIMPLE GROWING PLAN

One pot. Here's the plan.

A sunny outdoor patio with a long, warm growing season. Start with **a sweet potato slip**.

THE POT

20-gallon container

Choose a container labeled 20 US gallons, roughly 20 inches across and at least 15 inches deep, with drainage. Shapes vary; width alone does not prove its volume.

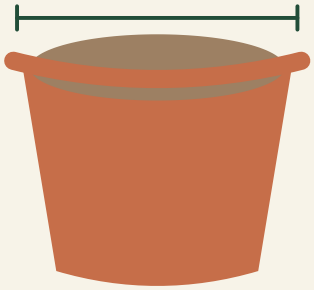
HOW MANY

1 rooted slip

Choose an edible compact variety such as Vardaman Bush.

THE CONTAINER

20-gallon container



Drainage holes

START WITH

1 rooted slip



Illustration · not to scale

20-gallon container · 1 rooted slip Choose a container labeled 20 US gallons, roughly 20 inches across and at least 15 inches deep, with drainage. Shapes vary; width alone does not prove its volume. Choose an edible compact variety such as Vardaman Bush. Original illustration; not to scale.

01

Buy a slip, not seed pieces

A slip is a small shoot grown from a sweet potato. Buy one healthy plant with a few leaves and young roots. Choose a food-crop variety; a decorative sweet potato vine is selected for foliage.

02

Wait for warm conditions

After frost danger, wait until the mix is at least 65°F. Fill the container, leaving room below the rim. Put it in its final sunny location before watering makes it heavy.

03

Plant the lower stem

Set the slip in the center, burying its roots and about 4 inches of lower stem while leaving the upper leaves above the mix. Use a slip long enough for that depth. Firm gently and water through; keep the rooting area moist while it establishes.

04

Let it spread, then lift

Allow the vines to trail clear of walkways. Start checking a root near the expected maturity date. Harvest before frost, easing roots out of the mix instead of pulling on the vines.

Help with the setup: drainage holes and saucers · potting mix vs. garden soil.

Other ways to start

Make a slip from a seed root

Buy a healthy sweet potato sold for propagation. Lay it in a shallow tray of damp mix, cover with about 2 inches of mix, and keep it warm. After shoots develop, grow them in bright light. At about 6–8 inches tall, separate one and root it before moving to the big pot. Allow about 6 weeks for this extra step.

Root a vine cutting

A cutting from a healthy edible sweet potato vine can make another plant. Root the lower nodes in moist mix, keeping leaves above it. A nursery slip is simpler for the first crop, and the new plant still needs a full warm growing season.

YOUR EVERYDAY ROUTINE

Water & fertilizer at a glance.

WATER WHEN

Keep a new slip evenly moist for two weeks. Later, water as the top inch starts drying until drainage begins. Avoid repeated heavy soaking near harvest.

FERTILIZER

Espoma Garden-tone (US 3-4-4)

AMOUNT

2½ level tablespoons for the entire 20-inch-wide container

WHAT THAT AMOUNT COVERS

Dry granules for the whole pot. Label rate: 1½ teaspoons per 4 inches of measured diameter; do not calculate from gallon capacity.

HOW OFTEN TO FEED

No more often than monthly while growing.

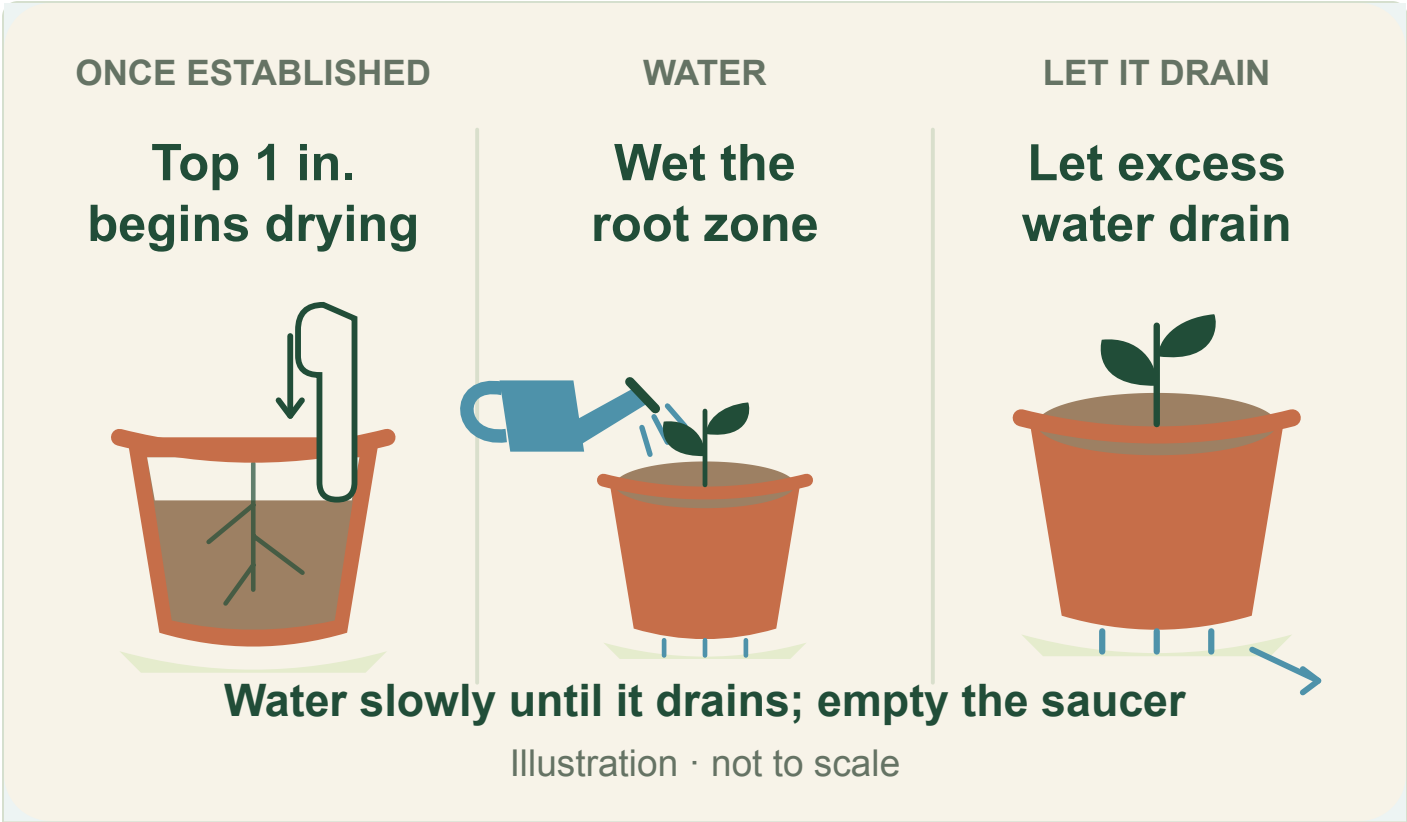
WHEN TO START OR PAUSE

Skip feed at planting. Follow the potting-mix bag's starter-feed period; "up to 2 months" is not an exact guarantee. Skip near harvest.

01 / EVERYDAY CARE

When to water.

Check daily. Keep the new slip's rooting area evenly moist for the first two weeks. Later, water as the top inch starts drying: pour slowly over the mix until water drains from the holes, then empty any saucer. Keep moisture steady through early root development. Near harvest, avoid heavy repeated soaking, but do not deliberately leave the plant wilted. A fixed gallon amount will not suit every mix and weather condition.



Check before watering. Keep a new slip evenly moist for two weeks. Later, water as the top inch starts drying until drainage begins. Avoid repeated heavy soaking near harvest. Original illustration; not to scale.

> **The easy rule**
>
> Check first. Water only when the plant needs it.

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02 / PLANT FOOD

Exactly what to feed it.

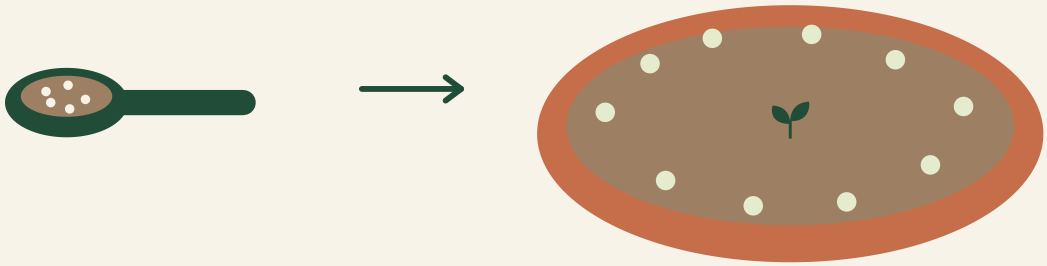
This recipe starts with pre-fertilized potting mix, so add no extra fertilizer at planting. Check the feeding instructions on the actual bag: “up to 2 months” is an upper limit, not a guarantee that every pot stays fed for exactly eight weeks. Use the top-up only after the mix’s feeding period and while the plant is growing.

MEASURE

2½ level tbsp

SHARE ACROSS ONE CONTAINER

20-inch-wide container



Around the outer edge

Whole-pot dose · then water in

Illustration · not to scale

2½ level tablespoons for the entire 20-inch-wide container Dry granules for the whole pot. Label rate: 1½ teaspoons per 4 inches of measured diameter; do not calculate from gallon capacity. No more often than monthly while growing. Skip feed at planting. Follow the potting-mix bag's starter-feed period; "up to 2 months" is not an exact guarantee. Skip near harvest. Original illustration; not to scale.



US PRODUCT REFERENCE

Espoma Organic

Garden-tone

3-4-4

Granular: measure onto growing mix

Check the official US product ↗

Illustrated reference; check the manufacturer's current packaging and US label.

A MEASURED TOP-UP AFTER THE STARTER FEED

Espoma Organic Garden-tone (US 3-4-4 granules)

For a container measuring 20 inches across, use 2½ level tablespoons of Garden-tone 3-4-4 for the whole pot. Spread it near the outer edge, away from the stem, and water in. This follows the label rate of 1½ teaspoons per 4 inches of pot diameter. Repeat no more often than monthly after starter feeding ends; skip near harvest. For another width, recalculate from the label rather than the gallon size. Do not add a second fertilizer.

Check the manufacturer's product page ↗

These are dry granules, measured for the whole pot, not for each plant. Keep them off stems and leaves, then water in. Use the named US product and the directions on your bag.

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03 / WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

When to expect a root harvest

Utah State lists Vardaman Bush at about 110 days from planting; cooler conditions can delay it. This one-slip pot is a small harvest experiment. Root number and size vary, and the container needs much more room than an herb pot.

Allow enough warm growing months

Set the slip outside after frost danger has passed and the potting mix reaches at least 65°F. Give this approximately 110-day variety a long warm season. Start checking roots before fall nights become cold; harvest before frost rather than waiting for frost to kill the vines.

For regional planting windows, find your local Cooperative Extension office ↗.

Something looking off?

Can I bury a whole sweet potato or chunks like a potato?

Use slips for this plan. Sweet potatoes form storage roots and are grown differently from ordinary potatoes, which commonly start from seed-potato pieces. You can use a healthy sweet potato to produce slips first.

Is a 5-gallon bucket enough?

It is too small for this roomy beginner recipe. Use the 20-gallon container for one plant, or choose a different small-space crop. More slips in the same pot do not guarantee more food.

Why do I have vines but small roots?

The crop may still be young, or the season may be too cool or short. Check the variety's maturity date, sun, and pot size. Extra nitrogen can encourage more leaves and will not solve those problems.

Should I eat the roots as soon as I dig them?

You can cook them fresh, but curing improves sweetness and helps small wounds heal. Handle gently and do not scrub roots intended for storage. A warm, protected, airy place helps; never seal damp roots in a bag.

How do I cure and store them?

For a controlled cure, Mississippi State gives 80–85°F and 85–90% relative humidity for 7–10 days. A warm, covered, ventilated home location may provide only partial curing; a cool porch is not equivalent. Spread roots in one layer, protect them from rain, and never seal them wet. Store sound roots at 55–60°F with airflow. Keep raw roots out of the refrigerator and inspect for decay.

Choosing edible slips and a roomy pot

Choose a compact edible sweet potato slip

Vardaman Bush is the named starting option here. "Bush" still means a leafy plant needing room around the container. A named edible slip also makes the expected harvest time easier to check.

Allow room for this container project

Maryland Extension reports successful 15–20-gallon containers. One slip in a 20-gallon pot is our uncrowded starter layout, not a tested yield promise. The 20-inch width is a shopping example; buy by stated capacity and measure the actual width before calculating fertilizer.

Help with your next step.

Set up a pot that drains

Choose drainage holes and manage the saucer before you plant.

Read the fertilizer already in your mix

Check the actual bag before adding a second fertilizer program.

Compare four other edible starter pots

The chart covers spinach, basil, cherry tomato and blueberry. Use it to compare alternatives; their pot sizes and feeding recipes do not apply to this plant.

BEHIND THIS GUIDE

Where the advice comes from.

Plant care is based on the sources below. Planting layouts and beginner routines combine that guidance into one practical plan; they are editorial choices, not results from a Plant Care Steps growing trial.

- Maryland Extension: warm planting, moisture, harvest, and home curing ↗
  https://extension.umd.edu/resource/growing-sweet-potatoes-home-garden
- Utah State: Vardaman Bush, slips, and vine cuttings ↗
  https://extension.usu.edu/yardandgarden/research/sweet-potatoes-in-the-garden
- Ask Extension: reported success with 15–20-gallon containers ↗
  https://ask.extension.org/kb/faq.php?id=622276
- Mississippi State: slip depth, establishment water, curing, and storage ↗
  https://extension.msstate.edu/publications/growing-sweet-potatoes-home
- Espoma: Garden-tone container dose and application ↗
  https://www.espoma.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/2020_EO_Garden-tone_Fact_Sheet.pdf
- Manufacturer: starter feed in the named potting mix ↗
  https://scottsmiraclegro.com/en-us/brands/miracle-gro/products/potting-mix/miracle-gro-organic-potting-mix/78951430.html
- Manufacturer: US fertilizer formula and application directions ↗
  https://www.espoma.com/product/garden-tone/

Something needs updating? Suggest a correction

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Compiled with AI assistance. These first-edition guides have not yet had an independent horticultural review. Read our editorial approach.