

Looking for a unique gift this holiday season for that one person that is always hard to shop for? You may need to look no farther than your own kitchen. Perhaps you might have bought some sweet potatoes (or were they [yams](#) ?) for Thanksgiving but succumbed to the seductive convenience of the 28 oz can instead, only to later find the neglected tubers still lurking unawares in the countertop shadows, now curiously sprouting what look to be small leaves.



If so, Congratulations, you're a winner! Wrap that sweet spud up, put a bow around it, and give it to someone you love.

We first discovered the magic about 3 years ago when cleaning the kitchen. Like mostly everyone else who is a human, we were quite familiar with the regrettable fact that old brown potatoes start sending out gangly whitish roots after months in solitary in a dark cupboard. But this here, this was clearly different. Here was a sweet potato that was actually growing several true and pretty little purple and green leaves. Whereas the logical impulse upon encountering a knobby metastasizing russet is to shut the cupboard door and pretend you didn't see it, conversely, a sweet potato with cute baby leaves seems to call instead upon the instincts to nurture. Quite clearly the sweet potato has the smarter gig going, evolutionarily speaking. Not surprising given that it is a relative of the shrewd and relentless [morning glory](#) vine.

So nurture we did, at least at first. We planted the leafy sweet potato in the ground in our community garden plot in the spring, mostly underground such that only the very top little tiny leaves were exposed. For a few weeks we watered it, tended its soil, waiting patiently, kind of. Then, just as if it were in the kitchen, we promptly forgot all about it among the other plants.

It wasn't until late that summer that we began to wonder about the vine with the purplish-green leaves that was suddenly growing strong, which incidentally we thought was owing to some beans we had planted. Months later, after the vine had effectively colonized the entire plot, with not a bean to show for, we cursed the fruitless vine and one day in late fall decisively began to yank it out. But it turned out to be anchored mightily, everywhere. The amazing revelation came upon unearthing the first of several substantial reddish-orange roots – sweet potato gold mine! We dug our hands happily into the soil, feeling for buried treasure and came up with a harvest of nearly 20 pounds in all – all from one neglected kitchen potato. We even found the original progenitor sweet potato which by now had grown thick with roots in all directions and looked like some kind of mutated baboon heart. Out of a combination of respect and fear we pretended we hadn't seen it and pushed the soil back over, a fortuitous gesture it turns out, which has resulted in the vine faithfully coming back each summer three years running to deliver a bountiful autumn crop .





How do you know when your sweet potatoes are ready to harvest? [Click here for more information.](#)



Preheat oven to 425 degrees Fahrenheit. Slice sweet potatoes into wedges, about 1/2 inch thick. Toss with oil and seasonings. Spread in a single layer, bake 25-30 minutes, turning at the



Sweet Potato Fries (inspired by various internet recipes) is a small dish that is easy to make and perfect for snacking. Preheat oven to 425 degrees Fahrenheit. Slice sweet potatoes into wedges, about 1/2 inch thick. Toss with oil and seasonings. Spread in a single layer, bake 25-30 minutes, turning at the