Sweet potatoes or yams?

K-State food scientist says most people likely have never eaten a yam

By Maddy Rohr, K-State Research and Extension news service

MANHATTAN, Kan. – Did you know sweet potatoes and yams are not the same? In fact, you’ve probably never eaten an actual yam, says Kansas State University horticulture expert Karen Blakeslee. Confusion between the two stems from labeling.

“Sweet potatoes are members of the morning glory family,” Blakeslee said. “Fresh sweet potatoes are harvested in the fall and are sweeter than yams.”

Sweet potatoes are available in four colors:
- Rose-colored skin with orange flesh.
- Pale copper-tan skin with white flesh.
- Red skin with dry white flesh.
- Purple skin and flesh.

Yams are related to lilies and are very starchy in texture, Blakeslee said. They are less sweet, larger and have a short shelf life.

“They look more like logs with thick skin,” Blakeslee said. “Yams must be cooked as they may contain toxins.”

Sweet potatoes are more nutritious than yams and contain fewer calories. Blakeslee said they both contain amylase which helps break down starch into sugar that our bodies can use readily.

Blakeslee, who also is coordinator of K-State’s Rapid Response Center for Food Science, publishes a monthly newsletter called You Asked It! that provides numerous tips on food safety.

More information is also available from local extension offices in Kansas.

-30-
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Rapid Response Center, https://www.rrc.k-state.edu
You Asked It! newsletter, https://www.rrc.k-state.edu/newsletter
K-State Research and Extension local offices, https://www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/statewide-locations.html

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