

# Sweet potato party!

By Laura Kurella

It can be a challenge to find ways to breathe new life into your Thanksgiving Day meal, especially since this holiday is so well-steeped with traditional dishes.

Some dishes so traditional that we not dare tamper with, which is why it is best to look only for ways to infuse new flavors on old standards that would benefit from a tweak that also won't bend anyone out of shape as a result. That's why I think a great place to start is with snacks or appetizers, or anything else you send out of the kitchen to console oh-so-hungry relatives waiting in hopeful expectation of the grand feast that those laboring in the kitchen are toiling to turn out!

One Thanksgiving mainstay that fits this bill well is the little old sweet potato, or yam as some people say.

What's interesting is that sweet potatoes are not a type of yam, and yams are not a type of sweet potato, making for a confusing name game. In the U.S., we have two major types of sweet potatoes: Firm sweet potatoes, which stay firm after cooking, and have golden skin and paler flesh; and soft sweet potatoes, which become soft after cooking, and have copper skin and orange flesh.

While the firm variety were the first to be commercially produced in the U.S., when the soft variety began commercially available, they needed to find a way to distinguish between the two, so they decided to dub the soft, orange variety a yam only because it bore a slight resemblance to this tuber, nothing more.

Today, there are many versions of sweet potatoes available around, but most likely all that you encounter will always be labeled as a yam!

Fortunately, at least for the purposes of this col-



**LAURA KURELLA**

umn's recipes, any potato you prefer to choose will do. In fact, if you don't like sweet potatoes - or yams - you can substitute a nice Yukon Gold, or a Russet, or even a big red would work, too!

Here now are three delightfully different ways to turn any tuber you choose into a truly hot potato treat. Happy Thanksgiving.

**Cheesy-Fruity Yam Bites**

Prep time: 15 minutes;  
Cook time: 30 minutes;  
Total time:45 minutes;  
Yield: about 12 servings.

1 medium sweet potato  
Extra virgin olive oil  
goat, vegan, or cream cheese

1 pear or apple, rinsed  
a handful of fresh thyme

Pecans or walnuts

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Line a baking tray with parchment paper and set aside. Wash and dry sweet potato then slice into 1/4 to 1/2-inch thick slices. Place slices on prepared sheet and sprinkle with oil. Toss slices to coat with oil, then spread out in a single layer. Bake for 15 minutes, take the tray from the oven and flip slices over. Return to oven for another 15 minutes, or until sweet potatoes are lightly browned from the edges. While potato slices slightly cool, slice pear or apple. Assemble by adding cheese, fruit, nut then fresh thyme on top of the sweet potato slices. Serve immediately.

**Meaty-Sweetie Bombs**

Prep time: 15 minutes;  
Cook time: 30 minutes;

Total time:45 minutes;  
Yield: about 40 servings.

4 slices thick-cut bacon  
2 sweet potatoes, scrubbed clean, peels on  
2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

1 1/4 teaspoons unrefined mineral salt, divided use

1 teaspoon black pepper

2 medium avocados, peeled, pitted, and diced

1 tablespoon fresh lime juice

1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika

3 tablespoons chopped cilantro

Preheat oven to 400 degrees. Place bacon on a parchment-lined, rimmed baking sheet and bake bacon until crisp. Remove from oven and let cool.

Line two more rimmed baking sheets with parchment then using a mandolin or very sharp knife, slice sweet potatoes into 1/4- to 1/2-inch thick slices, one on top of each lined pan. Drizzle both piles of slices with oil then toss to coat. Arrange slices in a single layer on sheets, then sprinkle with salt and black pepper. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, until golden brown underneath, rotating the pans 180 degrees and changing their positions on the upper/lower racks halfway through. Remove pans from the oven, flip slices over, then roast for an additional 8 to 11 minutes, or until golden on top. Meanwhile, chop cooled bacon and set aside. Then in a small bowl, combine avocado, lime juice, and smoked paprika. Mash lightly with a fork, leaving the mixture slightly chunky. Set aside. Transfer baked sweet potato slices to a serving plate. Top each with a dollop of the avocado mixture, chopped bacon, and cilantro. Serve warm or at room temperature.

**Honey-Balsamic Yam Bites**



*Put a new spin on an old favorite by turning those yammy sweet potatoes into true hot potato treats. Photograph by Laura Kurella*

Prep time: 10 minutes;  
Cook time: 20 minutes;  
Total time: 30minutes;  
Yield: about 24 servings.

2 medium sweet potatoes, cut into 1/4 in slices

1 teaspoon unrefined mineral salt

1 teaspoon sweet paprika

3 tablespoons olive oil  
5 ounces goat cheese

1/2 cup walnuts

1/3 cup dried cranberries

3 tablespoons honey

2 tablespoons balsamic reduction

Preheat oven to 425 degrees. In large bowl place cut sweet potatoes. Sprinkle them with salt, paprika and oil then toss well, making sure all is coated. Line large bak-

ing sheet with parchment paper then spread potatoes out in a single layer. Bake for 10 minutes on each side, flipping half way through, for a total of 20 minutes baking time. Transfer to a serving plate then top each potato with some goat cheese, walnuts, and cranberries. Spoon a little honey over each bite then finish with a drizzle of balsamic glaze.

**Balsamic Reduction**

Prep time: 2 minutes;  
Cook time: 15 minutes;  
Total time: 17minutes;  
Yield: 4 tablespoons

1 cup balsamic vinegar

In a small saucepan set over medium-high heat, heat balsamic vinegar

until it begins to boil. Once balsamic is simmering, reduce heat to medium or medium-low and continue simmering, stirring occasionally, until the desired consistency (thickness) is reached, which should be at about 1/4 cup of liquid remaining, and slightly thicker than maple syrup. Remove from the heat and cool for several minutes. Transfer to an airtight container and store in a cool, dry place for use within 3 months. If you accidentally over-reduce it, making it too thick, simply whisk in a tiny amount of warm water until it thins out.