

SWEET

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It makes a richly flavored, robust meal, heavy with black beans, tomatoes, diced onion and red bell pepper providing a foundation of flavor for the star attraction, the sweet potatoes. Don't tell anyone, but I added a bit of hot sauce to my bowl.

Sweet potato fries, of course, are always popular. I thought about simply dropping them into hot oil and frying them, but then I came across a recipe for oven-baked fries — though “oven-baked fries” is an oxymoron.

I'm not actually sure if baking fries in an oven is any better for you than frying them in oil. The recipe I used requires two tablespoons of oil for two large sweet potatoes, and I am not convinced that fries that are fried would soak up more than that amount.

Still, the reason to make oven-baked sweet-potato fries is compelling: They are excellent.

Baking them in an oven allows the fries' exterior to become crispy, or at least moderately crispy, while the interior is soft and creamy. They are just what fries should be, only sweeter than ordinary fries.

Perhaps it is counterintuitive, but these sort-of-sweet fries are even better when served not with ketchup but with honey. Add a little cinnamon for an extra treat.

The next dish I made is similar in some ways to the oven-baked fries. Parmesan Baked Sweet Potatoes are cooked the same way — tossed with a little bit of oil and then baked — so they have the same crisp and creamy textures. But the similarity ends there.

The fries are spiced with garlic powder, paprika, salt and black pepper; these intense flavors contrast nicely with the smooth, sweet taste of the sweet potatoes. But the Parmesan Baked Sweet Potatoes offer a little more than the Parmesan cheese melted on top under the broiler at the end of cooking.

The cheese here serves only as an accent. It is an exclamation point at the end of a sweet sweet-potato sentence.

Next up was the baked-potato version of a sweet potato. The sweet potato here is baked whole until it is completely tender. So far, there is nothing extraordinary about it.

The extraordinary part comes from the sauce that is drizzled over the top. The sauce begins with melted butter that has been browned, so it tastes a little nuttier. That is combined with a bit of honey and a dash of vinegar, for a subdued sweet-and-sour effect, and some crushed red pepper to bring on just enough heat.

If you like the sauce on sweet potatoes you can try adding it to anything from winter squash to oatmeal to ice cream.

Last came dessert. Sweet potatoes are one of the very few vegetables that can legitimately be used in dessert.

I made a sweet potato pie. Of course I did. What else would a pie-lover make?

The ingredients may sound familiar: cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger and cloves. It's what goes into any pumpkin pie worth its salt (salt is also an ingredient). But what makes this sweet potato pie better



Vegan sweet potato chili.

Christian Gooden/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS



Parmesan sweet potatoes.

Christian Gooden/St. Louis Post-Dispatch-TNS

than ordinary pumpkin pies are the other ingredients.

Along with the heavy cream and eggs, this pie also benefits from brown sugar and bourbon. These additions bring a rich and round depth to the pie. It is a flavor-forward dessert, where the ingredients all act in harmony to bring color and emphasis to the sweet potato at the heart of it all.

SWEET POTATO PIE

Yield: 8 servings

- 1 pie crust
- 1 1/2 pounds sweet potatoes
- 1 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 cup brown sugar
- 1/2 cup good maple syrup
- 1/2 cup granulated sugar
- 5 tablespoons salted butter, melted
- 3 eggs beaten
- 1/4 cup bourbon
- 1/2 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 3/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1/8 teaspoon ground cloves
- 1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon ground ginger

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees. Place pie crust in a 9-inch pan and poke holes all over with a fork. Line with aluminum foil or parchment paper, weight down with pie weights or dried beans and bake until edges just begin to turn golden brown, about 15 to 18 minutes. Remove weights and lining, and cool thoroughly to room temperature.

2. Raise oven temperature to 425 degrees. Place sweet potatoes on a baking sheet, pierce all over with a fork and roast for 1 hour. Remove them from the oven, peel and place in a large mixing bowl. Mash with a potato masher. Lower oven temperature to 325 degrees.

3. Add the cream, brown sugar, maple syrup, granulated sugar, melted butter, eggs, bourbon, cinnamon, salt, nutmeg, cloves, pepper and ginger to the mashed sweet potatoes and stir well to combine. Pour into the prebaked pie shell (you may have some filling left over). Bake 50 minutes. Serve

warm or cold.

Per serving: 484 calories; 22 g fat; 11 g saturated fat; 106 mg cholesterol; 6 g protein; 67 g carbohydrate; 42 g sugar; 4 g fiber; 476 mg sodium; 84 mg calcium

— Adapted from “My Beverly Hills Kitchen” by Alex Hitz

ROASTED SWEET POTATOES WITH HOT HONEY BROWNED BUTTER

Yield: 4 servings

- 4 small to medium sweet potatoes, scrubbed
- 6 tablespoons (3/4 stick) butter
- 1 teaspoon crushed red pepper flakes
- 2 tablespoons honey
- 1 tablespoon white wine vinegar or apple cider vinegar
- Salt and pepper
- Flaky sea salt

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees.

2. Poke each sweet potato all over with a fork and place directly on the oven rack. Roast until they are impossibly tender, with bits of sweet potato sugar caramelizing in the spot they've been poked, 60 to 80 minutes.

3. Meanwhile, melt the butter in a small pot over medium heat, swirling the pan until the butter starts to bubble and brown, about 5 minutes. Add the honey, vinegar and red pepper flakes, and season with salt and pepper. Remove from the heat and set aside (this sauce can be made up to 5 days in advance and kept refrigerated; rewarm in a small pot before using).

4. Once the sweet potatoes are out of the oven, slit them down the middle. Warm up the browned butter mixture and pour over the sweet potatoes (alternatively, scoop the flesh

out of the skins and transfer it to a bowl or serving dish, then drizzle with the browned butter sauce). Sprinkle with flaky sea salt.

Per serving: 300 calories; 17 g fat; 11 g saturated fat; 46 mg cholesterol; 2 g protein; 36 g carbohydrate; 14 g sugar; 4 g fiber; 861 mg sodium; 47 mg calcium

— Recipe from “Dining In” by Alison Roman

OVEN-BAKED SWEET POTATO FRIES

Yield: 6 servings

- 2 pounds sweet potatoes, peeled
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1 teaspoon garlic powder
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon black pepper

1. Line 2 rimmed baking sheets with parchment paper and place in oven. Preheat oven (with baking sheets in them) to 400 degrees.

2. Cut the sweet potatoes into sticks 1/4- to 1/2-inch wide and 3 inches long, and toss them with the oil.

3. Mix the garlic powder, paprika, salt and pepper in a small bowl, and toss them with the sweet potatoes. Remove the hot baking sheets from the oven, scatter them with the fries in a single layer and return the baking sheets to the oven.

4. Bake until brown and crisp on the bottom, about 12 to 15 minutes, then flip and cook until the other side is crisp, about 10 minutes. Serve hot.

Per serving: 130 calories; 4 g fat; 1 g saturated fat; no cholesterol; 2 g protein; 23 g carbohydrate; 5 g sugar; 4 g fiber; 353 mg sodium; 36 mg calcium

— Adapted from a recipe by Mark Bittman in the *New York Times*

PARMESAN SWEET POTATOES

Yield: 4 to 6 servings

- 3 sweet potatoes
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- Pepper
- 2 tablespoons Parmesan cheese, finely grated

1. Preheat oven to 425 degrees. Peel sweet potatoes and cut into 1 1/2-inch chunks. In a large bowl, toss sweet potatoes with oil, salt and a generous amount of pepper. Spread in a single layer on a baking sheet.

2. Bake 15 minutes, flip sweet potatoes and cook until brown and tender, 10 minutes. Sprinkle with Parmesan. Cook under broiler until the cheese has melted, 1 to 2 minutes.

Per serving (based on 4): 156 calories; 7 g fat; 11 g saturated fat; 2 mg cholesterol; 2 g protein; 20 g carbohydrate; 4 g sugar; 3 g fiber; 387 mg sodium; 63 mg calcium

— Adapted from a recipe by Kelli Foster in *thekitchn.com*

VEGAN SWEET POTATO CHILI

Yield: 8 to 10 servings

- 2 or 3 sweet potatoes, about 1 1/2 to 2 pounds
- 2 (15-ounce) cans black beans, undrained
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon smoked paprika
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 1 large white onion, diced
- 1 red bell pepper, diced
- 3 or 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 to 2 tablespoons mild pickled jalapenos, optional
- 1 tablespoon chili powder
- 3/4 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1/2 teaspoon oregano
- 2 (14-ounce) cans fire-roasted tomatoes
- 1 1/2 cups water
- 1 tablespoon cornmeal
- 1 teaspoon molasses or other sweetener
- 1 teaspoon unsweetened cocoa

1. Preheat oven to 400 degrees.

2. Cube sweet potatoes and place in a large bowl. Add 1 tablespoon of the juice from the beans, salt and paprika, and toss to coat. Scatter in single layer on a baking sheet. Roast for 20 minutes and set aside to cool.

3. Add oil to a large Dutch oven over medium-high heat. Add onion and red bell pepper, and sauté until softened, about 3 to 5 minutes.

4. Stir in garlic, jalapeño if using, chili powder, cumin and oregano. Cook 3 minutes, stirring often.

5. Add tomatoes, water, cornmeal, sweetener and cocoa. Bring to a simmer and cook 30 minutes, stirring occasionally.

6. Drain and rinse black beans; add to chili. Add roasted sweet potatoes and taste for seasoning; add salt as needed.

Per serving (based on 8): 282 calories; 2 g fat; 2 g saturated fat; no cholesterol; 10 g protein; 55 g carbohydrate; 12 g sugar; 15 g fiber; 12 mg sodium; 120 mg calcium

— Adapted from a recipe by Chuck Underwood in *Brandnewvegan.com*



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