



ANN BLOOM
IT'S ALL GOOD

It's sweet potato season

Potato, potawto? Tomato, tomawto? Isn't that how the old song goes? Either way you pronounce the potato part, the sweet potato has a lot going for it.

Since November is National Sweet Potato Month and many of us will be eating sweet potatoes in some form for Thanksgiving, we should celebrate them for their nutritional qualities.

The sweet potato is an underground tuber, with pointed ends and red, brown or yellow skin. It is available throughout the year in the grocery store, though is at its least expensive and best quality from October to January. It comes in a variety of colors from red to yellow, white to purple and violet to pink. It is good fried, baked, boiled, grilled, steamed or roasted. It is good used in savory dishes (i.e., soups) or as a dessert (i.e., sweet potato pie). Mashed sweet potato can be substituted for pumpkin in pies, breads and muffins. The tuber lends itself well to recipes that include spices such as ginger, nutmeg, cinnamon and cloves.

Sweet potatoes should be stored in a cool, dry place and used within two weeks. When choosing sweet potatoes, look for tubers that are firm, smooth skinned and free of soft spots, cuts or blemishes. Soft areas, scabby areas or brown spots may indicate spoilage or tough, inedible flesh. One pound of raw, fresh sweet potato equals three cups shredded, cubed or sliced sweet potato which equals one and 3/4 cups cooked, mashed sweet potato. According to www.foodhero.org, storing raw sweet potatoes in the refrigerator can cause a hard center and an unpleasant taste. Scrub sweet potatoes under cool, running water just before using.

According to Healthline website writer, Adda Hjarnadottir, MS, RDN, the sweet potato is rich in antioxidants and high in fiber which aids in digestion. The sweet potato is low in fat and relatively low in calories. A half cup of sweet potato contains about 125 calories. It is considered a nutrient dense food, which means it contains more nutrients relative to, or compared to, its calorie content. It is sweet-tasting owing to its starch and sugar content. What contributes to an increase in calories of the sweet potato is the butter, maple syrup/brown sugar and marshmallows of the typical American holiday recipe used to prepare them.

Sweet potatoes are high in beta-carotene, the element that accounts for the vegetable's orange color (carrots are also high in beta-carotene for the same reason), which the body converts to Vitamin A. Vitamin A is essential for eye health. Vitamin C is also found in sweet potatoes and is a vitamin that helps heal cuts and bruises and is important for gum health.

Potassium, a mineral which may help with heart health, manganese important for growth and metabolism, Vitamin B6 which helps convert food into energy and Vitamin E, a fat-soluble antioxidant which may help protect against cell damage, are all found in a sweet potato.

Sweet potatoes are well tolerated by most people. However, they are considered fairly high in oxalates, a substance which may increase the risk of kidney stones in some people. Therefore, people who are prone to kidney stones may wish to consult with their primary care provider to check on their intake of sweet potatoes and see how much, if any, is right for them.

The sweet potato originated in South and Central America and is a tropical member of the morning glory family. It is one of the oldest foods known to mankind, dating back more than 5,000 years. A sweet potato is easy to sprout and makes an interesting house plant. According to www.specialtyproduce.com, there are hundreds of varieties of sweet potatoes grown throughout the world. Domestically, there are two varieties usually grown in the United States. Production of sweet potatoes in the United States primarily is in Louisiana, Mississippi and North Carolina.

By the way, a sweet potato and a yam are not related; it is a misnomer that they are. Though people use them interchangeably, they are two different species. Yams are part of the lily family and originated in Africa and Asia. There are about 600 varieties of yams. Yams are more starchy tasting, and some can get very large, growing up to five feet in length. You may find a tuber in the grocery store labeled a "garnet yam." This is a dark-skinned sweet potato.

Either way you pronounce your sweet potato — potato or potawto — don't call the whole thing off and enjoy them as a regular part of a healthy diet.

For recipes or information on sweet potatoes, go to www.foodhero.org.

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Hillary Levin/St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Fresh-baked croissants.

Quicker croissants

Buttery, crispy pastries in hours, not days

By **DANIEL NEMAN**
St. Louis Post-Dispatch

I said that I had seen some recipes claiming you can make croissants in just four hours. I scoffed, dismissively. Everyone knows the best croissants take three days to make.

She said nothing. She said nothing very loudly.

You have a way to make croissants in just four hours? I asked.

She said she did. And since she is Helen Fletcher, the pastry chef at Tony's in St. Louis, I took her seriously.

It turns out she knows how to make croissants in just four hours. Actually, what she knows is how to make laminated dough in four hours, and that is the most time-consuming part of croissants.

Laminated doughs are doughs for puff pastries and croissants that bake up into dozens of delicate, crisp, buttery layers. They almost shatter into a cloud of pastry dust in your mouth when you bite into them.

The traditional way to make them is to roll out a sheet of dough and cover it with a cool-but-pliable sheet of butter. You then fold those sheets into thirds, like a letter, chill it so the butter does not melt, roll it and fold it into thirds again, chill it again, fold it into thirds, chill and, if you have the time and patience, fold and chill one more time.

A faster and easier way, with results that are nearly as good, involves shredding frozen butter over the initial sheet of dough before folding and optionally chilling several times (you don't have to refrigerate it if you can work fast enough). This method produces what the cheerful folks on "The Great British Baking Show" call "rough puff pastry," or just "rough puff."

Fletcher's method is rougher than rough — that is, it is further from the original concept of laminated doughs. But it is faster and easier and, it turns out, every bit as good.

Fletcher's method, which she details in her blog *Pastries Like a Pro*, does not include a thin layer of butter between each thin layer of dough. In regular laminated doughs, the butter steams as it cooks, and the pressure of the steam forces each layer a little bit apart, resulting in beautifully puffed pastry.

Instead, she incorporates the butter into the dough, as you would a flaky pie crust. Because the dough is repeatedly folded over on itself, as with traditional laminated doughs, you still end up with all of the exquisite layers that you would find in other croissants and puff pastries.

She uses a food processor to save time, and saves more by freezing the dough and the pieces of butter before mixing them in the processor. This step makes the dough — with the butter in it — cold enough that you don't have to refrigerate it for an hour after every time you fold it.

Generally, you can make all of your folds before the dough warms up to the point that you have to refrigerate it (the idea is to keep the butter from softening; if it is soft, it won't turn to steam when it is heated). In the summer, or if your kitchen is hot, you may have to refrigerate it before you can finish all of your folds. But if the dough feels cool to the touch, you're good to go.

The longest part of making traditional croissants is spent simply waiting for the dough to gradually develop a robust flavor and a slight tang to counteract the richness. Fletcher cleverly saves two full days by adding robust and tangy buttermilk to the dough.

This method uses quite a lot of yeast — one whole tablespoon, which is more than a packet — to get the croissants to rise quickly, and it calls for instant yeast (rapid-rise) for additional speed. To make them rise faster, she proofs them in an

oven that is turned off but has a pan of hot water, which warms the oven just enough for proofing.

And to keep the delicate croissants from burning on the bottom as they cook, she uses what she calls the "double-pan" method. She places the baking sheet on top of another baking sheet and cooks the croissants in the top third of the oven. Two baking sheets take longer to get hot than one, which gives the croissants time to cook to a golden brown all over without scorching the bottoms.

The result is croissants that are simply spectacular, much better than you can get at a grocery store and probably some bakeries. They're light, they're crisp, they're delicate and they're the perfect blend of thin pastry and butter.

And they don't take three days to make. You can make them in just four hours.

OK, maybe five.

CROISSANTS

Yield: 16 servings

- 1 cup plus 2 tablespoons water, about 75 degrees Fahrenheit
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 3 cups bread flour (420 grams or scant 15 ounces)
- 1/2 cup powdered buttermilk, see note
- 1 tablespoon instant yeast
- 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
- 1 1/2 teaspoons salt
- 1/2 pound (2 sticks) unsalted butter
- 1 egg, well beaten

Note: If you can't find powdered buttermilk, substitute whole buttermilk. Use 3/4 cup buttermilk and 1/4 cup water in place of the water and dry buttermilk powder. Everything else remains the same.

1. Combine the water and oil. Set aside.
2. With the steel blade in place, add the flour, powdered buttermilk, instant yeast, sugar and salt to the bowl of a food processor. Process about 5 seconds to mix everything.

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The next generation of sugar replacements

By **LARISSA ZIMBEROFF**
Bloomberg News

We've entered a new era in our love-hate relationship with sugar. After decades of trying to make substitutes like Sweet'N Low, Splenda and Stevia work for consumers, the sugar-alternative industry is fielding contenders with a better chance at unseating that ubiquitous substance.

The timing seems to be right. According to a recent survey by market research firm Euromonitor, 37% of consumers globally are looking for products with no sugar, no added sugar or low sugar. Overconsumption of sugar has long been connected to disease — it's cited as a contributing factor to obesity, which has tri-

pled globally since the 1970s, and cardiovascular disease, which is the leading cause of death globally. Obesity is also a factor in Type 2 diabetes, which afflicts hundreds of millions of people around the world.

In a 2021 nutrition survey on reasons to avoid sugar, more than 57% of respondents said doing so "makes them feel healthier." An equally high percentage reported "it's better for me to avoid these ingredients." The coronavirus pandemic has helped accelerate this trend, as some 79% of global consumers said they're planning to eat and drink more healthily over the next year, according to a report by consumer research firm FMCG Gurus. Of those consumers, 56% plan to reduce sugar intake.

In most cases, the new crop of sweeteners are derived from natural substances—including traditional sugar itself, otherwise known as sucrose. In a consumer market increasingly focused on healthier eating, that may come in handy.

The mountain, however, is high. Despite decades of medical admonitions, sugar is still pretty much everywhere. It's currently found in 60% of packaged foods sold in the U.S., which has one of the highest sugar intakes of any nation. One reason for this is clear to anyone who has tried traditional sugar substitutes. Few come close to matching the taste of sucrose in consumer taste tests or have the range in formulation for moisture, flavor and texture suitable for use in

packaged foods.

Indeed, Rabobank analyst Pablo Sherwell said 85% of all sweeteners consumed are still traditional sugar. All told, it's a \$100 billion market.

"The industry isn't concerned," he said.

But that may not be entirely the case. One industry trade group is already pushing back on how substitutes are presented to consumers. The Sugar Association, which says it represents 142,000 growers, processors and refiners of sugar, said it has asked the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to change labeling requirements so as to make it clearer when products contain alternative sweeteners.

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