

South Florida Tropicals: Boniato¹

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Background

The boniato or tropical sweet potato, (*Ipomoea batatas*), also known as **batatas** or **camote**, is a member of the morning glory family. It is extremely popular in South Florida, especially among Hispanics. Although all forms of the sweet potato originated in Central America, the boniato

was cultivated as early as 1000 B.C. in Columbia and Peru. A substantial acreage is now planted in Miami-Dade County, Florida. The boniato is often considered a cross between a baking potato and a sweet potato in flavor and color. It is easily distinguished from other sweet potatoes by its pink to burgundy-colored skin and its white or cream-colored flesh. It is also much fluffier, drier, and less sweet than the yellow or orange-fleshed sweet potato.

Availability

Available year-round in South Florida.

Selection

The boniato should be rock-hard, with no soft or moldy spots. The skin may be pinkish, purplish, cream, reddish, and patchier-looking than the orange or yellow-fleshed sweet potato.

Storage

Store at room temperature in a ventilated area for no more than a few days. Boniato is sensitive to cold and should not be stored below 55°F. Since home refrigerators generally

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have lower temperatures (40-45°F), refrigerator storage is not recommended. Because freshly harvested boniato is available throughout the year, the crop is not cured for long-term storage as the common sweet potato is. It is, therefore, prone to bruising and rapid spoilage. Cooked boniato does not usually keep well, it will become dry.

Uses

Boniato can be used in the same manner as the orange or yellow-fleshed sweet potato, although it will not be as sweet. Bake, boil, roast, fry, steam, sauté, mash, puree, cream, or combine in custards and flans, puddings, pies, and muffins. Boniato has a subtle flavor, and is easily overwhelmed by heavy seasonings. Peeled boniato must be dropped into cold water immediately, as the flesh discolors quickly. When cooking, keep the boniato completely covered with water, or gray and blue blotches may appear.

Nutritive Value

One-half cup of boniato contains:

- 20 grams carbohydrate
- 90 calories
- 1 gram protein
- 12 milligrams of vitamin C
- trace fat

Food Safety During Preparation

- Wash your hands with hot soapy water before and after:
 - handling fresh produce
 - handling raw meat, poultry, or seafood
 - using the bathroom
 - changing diapers
 - handling pets
- Scrub and wash boniato with a clean produce brush under cool tap water just before preparing. **Don't use soap or detergents.**
 - Cut away bruised or damaged areas before preparing or eating.
- Wash cutting boards, dishes, utensils, and counter tops often. Use hot soapy water and rinse well. **Sanitize** them after contact with fresh produce, raw meat, poultry, or seafood.

Table 1.

To Sanitize
Mix one teaspoon of unscented chlorine bleach in one quart of water.
Pour the mixture onto the surface and let sit at least one minute.
Rinse well with hot running water.

- Don't cross contaminate. Use clean cutting boards and utensils for fresh produce. If you can, use a separate cutting board for raw meat, poultry, and seafood.
- Do not consume ice that has come in contact with fresh produce or other raw products.
- Use a cooler with ice or ice gel packs when you take perishable foods outdoors. This includes cut fresh fruits and vegetables.

Following these steps will help reduce your risk of food-borne illness.

Basic Preparation

Cut large boniatos in 1/2 or 1/3. Place in a pot of boiling, salted water. Boil until completely cooked (when fork tender). Drain, peel, and serve at once

Yield

Depending on size, one boniato yields 2 (4 oz) servings.

Bake

Scrub 1 boniato per person and place in a greased casserole dish. Add a small amount of water and bake at 350°F for approximately 1½ hours. Test with a fork or cake tester to insure that the center is soft. Serve with margarine. For a crunchier skin, scrub and place boniato directly on the oven rack, as you would a regular baked potato. Bake at 400°F for approximately 1 hour. Because the skin becomes crunchy and hard, it is important to check the center for doneness.

Boil

Prepare 4-5 ounces (approximately ½ a boniato) per person. Scrub boniatos well. Cut in uniform size pieces, approximately the size of new potatoes. Place in a large pot of boiling, salted water, completely covering the boniatos with water. Boil until completely cooked, testing for doneness with a fork. Drain, peel, and serve at once.

Microwave

Microwave the same as baked potatoes, with cooking time between 6-9 minutes.

Using Boniatos

Tropicals vary in natural pectin, acid, and sugar content from one season to another due to the variations of the climate.

Scalloped Boniato and Pineapple

3 medium boniatos
1 can (or fresh) crushed pineapple
¼ teaspoon salt
4 tablespoons melted margarine (for greasing dish and on top)

Peel, slice, and boil boniato in water until tender. Drain and place in a greased baking dish. Cover with crushed pineapple and remaining margarine, and bake at 350° for approximately 30 minutes. Serve hot. Serves 4.

Reprinted with permission from *The Rare Fruit & Vegetable Council Cookbook* by the Rare Fruit and Vegetable Council of Broward County, Inc., Davie, Florida.

Boniato Stuffing

4 tablespoon melted margarine
1/3 cup minced onion
½ cup chopped celery
1½ cups breadcrumbs
2 cups hot mashed boniato

(Cook and mash boniato following the Boil or the Basic Preparation directions.) Sauté onion and celery in margarine over medium heat until soft. Add seasonings. Combine with breadcrumbs and boniato. Use this stuffing in skinless chicken breasts, thick pork chops, or as a side dish.

Original recipe from Beth Walsh, Former Food Specialist, IFAS.

Vegetable Sancocho

Sancocho or sancoche, a traditional stew of South America and the Caribbean.

1 pound yucca (cassava)
2 green plantains
2 green bananas
1 large red onion, coarsely chopped
¼ teaspoon ground annatto (Or substitute 1 teaspoon paprika instead)
1 large tomato, chopped
1 pound malanga, peeled, cut in 1-inch cubes
1 pound boniato, peeled, cut in 1-inch cubes
1 pound calabaza (approximately ¼ medium), seeded, peeled, cut in
 1-inch cubes
8 to 10 cups water

Optional:

1 Jalapeno pepper, seeded and diced (approximately 1 tablespoon)
2 teaspoons salt, or to taste
Chopped cilantro

Peel yucca with a knife, removing brown outer skin and pink underskin. Cut in half lengthwise and remove center string. Chop into bite-sized pieces and set aside. Using a knife, cut ends from plantains and green bananas. Make several lengthwise cuts through the peels of each. Slide knife under the edge of each section and remove peel. Chop peeled fruits into bite-sized rounds and set aside. Heat olive oil over moderate heat in a large heavy pot. Add the onion and sauté until translucent, approximately 3 minutes. Add the annatto and stir 30 seconds. Add the yucca, plantain, banana, tomato, malanga, boniato, and calabaza. Cover and simmer gently, until the vegetables are tender, approximately 1 hour. Yucca will be soft, calabaza will probably disintegrate. Salt to taste. Serve immediately or cool, cover, and refrigerate. Garnish with cilantro. Makes 8 servings.

Recipe used with permission from J.R. Brooks and Son, Homestead, FL.

Boniato Casserole

6 medium boniatos, cooked
2 cups raisins
½ cup chopped nuts, any type
1/3 cup sugar, or less to taste
½ cup corn syrup, or less to taste
1 lemon, juiced
2 tablespoon margarine
1 teaspoon vanilla
¼ teaspoon each: cinnamon, nutmeg, allspice, salt

Slice boniatos, and line greased baking dish with 1 layer of boniatos. Sprinkle with half the nuts and raisins. Put remaining sliced boniatos on top, adding another layer of nuts and raisins. Dot with margarine, pour syrup over the top, sprinkle with sugar and spices, and add lemon juice and vanilla. Bake at 350°F for 45 minutes.

Boniato Pudding

2 eggs, beaten
1 cup sugar, or less to taste
½ cup margarine
2 cups grated raw boniato

1 (13 oz.) can evaporated milk
½ cup low fat milk
½ teaspoon each: cinnamon, nutmeg and salt
1 cup shredded coconut

Combine eggs, margarine and sugar in large mixing bowl, stirring until well mixed. Add remaining ingredients and pour into an oiled 1½ quart casserole. Bake at 350°F for 1 hour.