

Florida Food Fare

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Boniato

Description: The boniato or tropical sweet potato, also known as *Batatas camote* or Cuban sweet potato, is a member of the morning glory family. It is extremely popular in south Florida, especially among those of Hispanic ancestry. Often considered a cross between a baking potato and a sweet potato, boniato 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: Commercially over 5,000 acres of boniatos are planted yearly in Dade County, Florida. This vegetable is available year-round, although scarce in February and March. Because freshly harvested boniato is available throughout the year, the crop is not cured for long term storage in the way that our common sweet potato is. It is therefore prone to bruising and rapid spoilage.

Selection and Care: The tuber 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. Store at room temperature in a ventilated spot, for as short a time as possible, but no more than 4-5 days. Boniato is a cold-sensitive crop and should not be stored below 55 degrees F., therefore refrigeration is not recommended. Cooked boniato does not usually keep well, since it will become dry.

Nutritional Value: One-half cup of boniato contains: 90 calories, 20 gm carbohydrate, 1 gm protein, 12 mg vitamin C, 612 mg potassium, trace fat.

Use & Preparation: Boniato has a subtle flavor and is easily overwhelmed by heavy seasonings. Use it in the same manner as the orange or yellow-fleshed sweet potato, taking into consideration its comparative fluffiness, pallor and lack of sweetness. Other uses include: bake, boil, roast, fry, steam, sauté, mash, puree, cream, combine in custards and flans, puddings, pie and muffins. 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.

Recipes:

Boniato Pudding

2 eggs, beaten	1/2 cup low fat milk
1 cup sugar, or less to taste	1/2 teaspoon cinnamon
1/2 cup butter	1/2 teaspoon nutmeg
2 cups grated raw boniato	1/2 teaspoon salt
1 13 ounce can low fat evaporated milk	1 cup shredded coconut

Combine eggs, butter and sugar in large mixing bowl; stirring until mixed. Add remaining ingredients and pour into an oiled 1 1/2-quart casserole. Bake at 350 degrees F. for 1 hour.

Boniato Casserole

6 medium boniatos, cooked	2 tablespoons butter
1 cup raisins	1 teaspoon vanilla
1/2 cup chopped nuts	1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
1/4 cup sugar, or less to taste	1/4 teaspoon nutmeg
1/4 cup corn syrup, or less to taste	1/4 teaspoon allspice
1 lemon, juiced	1/4 teaspoon salt

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