Published on *Kitchen Gardeners International* (http://kgi.org)

It's Not too Late to Plant Sweet Potatoes

Fri, 05/18/2012 - 10:45 -- Barbara Damrosch

Spring, eagerly awaited though it may be, can sometimes outstrip a gardener?s reserves of time and energy. There the garden awaits, a blank brown canvas, ready to be filled with the usual favorite crops. Leave it unplanted, and weeds will happily do the job for you.

This year, spring galloped even faster than usual, with summer?s hot breath not far behind. If it left you in the dust, so to speak, you might be looking for a quick filler that will consume the space, smother the weeds and yet give you a bountiful, delicious harvest. If that?s the case, sweet potatoes are the crop for you. Yes, they could have gone in a bit earlier, but it is not too late. Given plenty of water, they get off to a great start in warm weather and will soon be blanketing their allotted space with glamorous vines.

The sweet potato is the perfect annual ground cover. There are years when I don?t need all the space in my garden, so I grow them in whatever is left over. Often I?ll plant them along the garden?s edge and let them wander among a row of young apple trees that are too small to cast much shade. The vines keep grass and weeds from coming in and taking hold.

If there were ever a year when I decided to travel in summer instead of garden, I?d grow masses of sweet potatoes as a babysitter crop, letting a neighbor water them weekly in exchange for half the harvest. I figure you can never grow too many of them anyway. They keep all winter in a normally cool room ? no root cellar needed ? and brighten the winter table with their orange-fleshed, carotene-rich tubers. Cooking them is a simple matter of sticking them in the oven and turning it on.

I?d suggest buying a few organic sweet potatoes at the store and growing your own slips by sticking the tubers pointy side down in glasses of water. (If they are organic they are less apt to be treated to retard sprouting.) This is great fun to do, but it can be slow. Even the Postal Service will get slips to you faster. And companies like Steele Plant Co [1]. or Johnny?s Selected Seeds [2] can have them on your doorstep within a few days, giving you just enough time to get the soil ready. If your soil is clay, you?ll want to hill up the rows a bit for good drainage. Otherwise, just loosen the soil and mark out your rows, three feet apart.

When the slips arrive, they may look a little sad from their travels, with roots and emerging leaves, but don?t be disheartened. Poke them into the ground as soon as possible, one foot apart in the row, with just the top leaves showing above the soil. Water thoroughly. You will need to do some hoeing at first, to prevent weeds from taking hold while all those tiny plants are sending out their roots. But before you know it, that brown expanse will turn to green, and how sweet that will be.

Image (optional):

Image credit (optional):
source [3]
Crops:
sweet potato [4]
Type:
how-to [5]
Group content visibility:
Use group defaults
Promoted text:
It's Not too Late to Plant Sweet Potatoes

Source URL: http://kgi.org/blog/barbara-damrosch/its-not-too-late-plant-sweet-potatoes

Links:
[1] http://www.sweetpotatoplant.com
[2] http://www.johnnyseeds.com
[3] http://www.flickr.com/photos/ejchang/3602999807/
[4] http://kgi.org/crops/sweet-potato

[5] http://kgi.org/blog-type/how