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Japanese sweet potatoes are surprise ingredient

By Mary Billings

SPECIAL TO THE POST-DISPATCH

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"If possible, could you send me the recipe for mashed sweet potatoes from Sunset 44?"

Dee Tyler, Kirkwood

Sunset 44 has a surprise for you. Not only are these mashed sweet potatoes surprising in appearance, their flavor and fragrance are a treat.

"I use Japanese sweet potatoes when in season. They are a little starchier and white," said owner Bob Menendez. They are available in the fall at Asian markets and some natural food stores. Standard orange sweet potatoes may be substituted.

Japanese sweet potatoes begin to darken as soon as they are peeled or cut. Although the discoloration does not affect the flavor, you can take steps to prevent it. Place a water-filled pot next to the cutting board. Add the potatoes as soon as they are chopped to keep them as white as possible.

To mash the potatoes, Menendez presses them through the holes in a sieve-like tool called a ricer. A potato masher may be used instead. To avoid gluey-textured potatoes, don't use an electric mixer.

The addition of a vanilla bean gives a unique flavor, not attainable by the use of vanilla extract. After the bean has done its job of flavoring the cream for this recipe, it may be rinsed well, patted dry and submerged in granulated sugar. After a few weeks, the resulting vanilla sugar can be stirred into coffee or tea or used in baking.

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Let's Eat Recipe Card

Vanilla Sweet Potatoes

Yield: 12 servings

1 1/4 cups 40 percent ("gourmet") whipping cream

2 whole vanilla beans

3 or 4 Japanese sweet potatoes (about 2 3/4 pounds)

1/2 cup (1 stick) unsalted butter

1. Place cream in a heavy pot. Split vanilla beans lengthwise and gently scrape pulp and seeds into cream; add pods and bring just to a boil. Turn off heat and allow to steep at least 15 minutes.
2. Peel sweet potatoes, cut into chunks and immediately place in a pot with enough water to cover. Bring to a boil over high heat, then reduce heat slightly and cook potatoes until fork-tender. Drain potatoes and press through a ricer (or use a potato masher).
3. Strain cream. Return cream to pan. Add butter; heat to scalding (small bubbles form around the edge of the liquid). Stir in potatoes. Serve hot.

Per serving: 217 calories; 17g fat (71 percent calories from fat); 11g saturated fat; 55mg cholesterol; 2g protein; 14g carbohydrate; 4g sugar; 2g fiber; 35mg sodium; 43mg calcium; 320mg potassium.

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