



Tubers and Other Healthy Starches

Tubers are a family of potato-like root vegetables that grow underground. In African heritage cooking, traditional meals feature a variety of tubers that are baked, boiled, or mashed and served with vegetables, stews, and sauces. They are a source of healthy carbohydrates and energy for our bodies. They are also a wonderful source of fiber, vitamins, and minerals.

In Latin America, simply cooked and dressed tubers are an important part of the cuisine. Boiled, mashed, or turned into flour for bread, these hearty vegetables make a great compliment to any traditional protein.

The following are some Latin American and African tubers available in the United States. If you can't find them in your grocery store, they can be found in Latin, Caribbean, and African markets.

Tubers	
<p>Cassava is a staple tuber of African heritage, and is eaten in Latin America, West Africa, and the Caribbean, where it's also known as <i>manioc</i>, <i>mandioca</i>, or <i>yuca</i>. Cassava is usually peeled and boiled like potatoes. It is eaten as a main vegetable or stew ingredient and is an excellent source of vitamin C and manganese.</p>	
<p>Potatoes are a very popular crop for South Americans, particularly in the Andes where almost 4,000 different types of potatoes are grown. Like in America, potatoes are often mashed, boiled, fried, and added to stews in Latin American countries and often covered in sauces such as a Colombian Tomato Cheese Sauce. Chuño are a specialty of the Andes where potatoes are freeze dried through exposure to frost and sun on the mountaintops. The chuño are then reconstituted before cooking. Potatoes are an excellent source of vitamin B6, potassium, and vitamin C, and a good source of fiber.</p>	
<p>Sweet potatoes are naturally sweet and creamy and have some of the highest mineral and vitamin content of any tuber or root vegetable. They are especially rich in vitamin A and a good source of potassium and fiber.</p>	
<p>Taro, known as dasheen in the West Indies and cocoyam in the Caribbean, is another potato-like starch. Taro has a mild, nutty flavor and has three times the fiber of white potatoes. Its leaves are also used in African and Caribbean cuisines. Pureed like spinach, they can be made into a thick soup called callaloo.</p>	
<p>Yams and sweet potatoes are often mistaken for one another in America, but they are in fact quite different. While the flesh of sweet potatoes is generally orange with a smooth peel, yams are white inside and the outer layer is very fibrous. And while sweet potatoes are generally the size of potatoes, yams can be several feet long! In Africa, yams are considered a sacred food honored in stories and festivals. Authentic African yams can be found at African, Latino, or Caribbean markets. Yams are an excellent source of vitamin C, fiber and potassium.</p>	

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Other healthy starches include:

<p>Breadfruit: a round, soccer-ball-size fruit found in the Caribbean. Breadfruit is eaten like a starchy vegetable and can be substituted for white potatoes in almost any recipe. It is an excellent source of fiber, vitamin C, and a good source of potassium.</p>	
<p>Bananas and Plantains: other fruits that are prepared like vegetables in African heritage cooking. They are most commonly sliced and sautéed with cinnamon, allspice, and sugar, as a warm, sweet side dish. Fibrous bananas and plantains are also perfect for boiling and mashing with garlic and spices. Bananas are a good source of fiber, potassium, and vitamin C. Plantains are an excellent source of vitamin A, vitamin C and potassium, and they are a good source of fiber.</p>	
<p>Cornmeal: a Latin American flour that became an African heritage staple when it was imported long ago. Whole cornmeal is used to make cornmeal porridge dishes throughout African heritage regions—called coo coo in the Caribbean, hominy grits in the American South, and tou in West Africa.</p>	