

SWEET POTATOES WITH MAPLE TAHINI

Adapted from bonappetit.com

2.5 lb Japanese sweet potatoes, 1/4" wedges	1 Tbsp plus 1 tsp maple syrup
4 Tbsp avocado oil, divided	2 tsp lemon zest
salt and pepper	1 Tbsp lemon juice
1/2 c tahini	3 Tbsp pine nuts
2 Tbsp white wine vinegar	1/4 c chopped dill

1. Place racks in upper and lower thirds of oven and set rimmed baking sheet on each. Preheat to 375F. Toss sweet potatoes in a bowl with 2 Tbsp oil, seasoning with salt and pepper. Spread sweet potatoes in single layer on each baking sheet. Roast 30-35 minutes, turning halfway through.
2. Meanwhile, whisk tahini, vinegar, maple syrup, lemon zest, lemon juice, remaining 2 Tbsp oil, and 2 Tbsp water in a small bowl. Season with salt and pepper.
3. Toast pine nuts in a dry skillet over medium-high heat, tossing often, about 2 minutes. Transfer to a bowl and let cool.
4. Spoon tahini onto plates and arrange potatoes on top. Serve sprinkled with dill and pine nuts.

RADISH BUTTER

Adapted from thefeedfeed.com

8 oz European-style butter, room temp
8 large salad radishes (or 2-3 watermelon radishes)
1 tsp sea salt flakes

1. Add softened butter to a large bowl and mash with the back of a spoon to further soften.
2. Carefully grate the radishes on the second-largest side of the box grater. Place the radish flesh in a fine mesh strainer. Using a spoon, press on the radish flesh to extract as much liquid as possible.
3. Add drained radishes to the butter.
4. Add flaky salt and mix until well combined.
5. Serve on toasted sourdough, or on top of steak, fish, or roasted vegetables. Butter will keep in an airtight container in the fridge for up to two days.



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Leafy Greens: Store leafy greens in the fridge in a perforated plastic bag. If you chop and wash ahead of time, spin the leaves dry before putting back in the bag with a dry paper towel to absorb moisture. Refresh as needed by plunging them in ice water 15-20 minutes.

Carrots and Radishes: Refrigerate in a plastic bag or other closed container. To freeze carrots: Chop, blanch for 3 minutes, rinse in cold ice water, drain, let dry, and pack in an airtight container.

Sweet Potato: Store at room temperature. Refrigeration will cause them to harden and blacken when cooked. Check weekly and use any that may soften, most will keep for weeks or months.

Jarred Items: It's the best time of year to include Elmwood's organic Diced Tomatoes, BBQ or Salsa in your seasonal recipes—think chili, lasagna, soups, or what about as a pizza topping?

Dried Tomatoes: Store in the freezer. To reconstitute them, place in heatproof bowl, completely cover with boiling water, then let sit for 30 minutes until soft and pliable. Drain and pat dry. To reconstitute in oil, simply cover with a good-grade olive oil for 24 hours before using.

My Organic Evolution

When your three-year old looks up at you and asks, “Daddy, why did you spray poison on our food?” it makes you think. When you are trudging along a pond dam with a tank of herbicide sloshing around on your back, spraying invasive thistle weeds, and fish “accidentally” die off, it makes you think. When you produce a bumper crop of tomatoes at work but are not sure you want to take them home for the family, it makes you think.

As the guy Kentucky State University hired to convert an overworked cattle and tobacco farm into a research facility for small-scale farmers in the mid-80s, I had a big job ahead of me. KSU is renowned for its world-class aquaculture program to this day, and this farm in Franklin County was acquired for farm-scale demonstrations in the ponds on the farm. Being a young whipper snapper who was gonna do everything by the book, I headed out one day to kill thistles. All the how-to-be-a-good-farmer guidebooks—developed and disseminated by colleges of agriculture—had a chart of herbicides to spray for weeds. The chosen chemical was broad-spectrum, broadleaf weed killer that caused no harm to grasses, like the fescue and bluegrass I was rescuing. The next morning, I was delighted to see wilting thistles, but horrified to see hundreds of bluegill and catfish, plus a few bass, belly up in the pond. My larger-than-life boss, Doc Benson, very quietly informed me, “You can’t kill the goose that lays the golden egg and keep your job.” That made me think, how can I do this another way?

The whole time I was spraying that herbicide, something did not seem copacetic. I had been trained, and I actually had a license to follow the instructions on the label. The label is actually a 15 or 20 page multi-fold pamphlet attached to the jug in a little pouch. This document was complete with skull and crossbones, environmental contamination concerns, personal protective clothing requirements (rubber gloves, Tyvek suit, goggles, etc), and cleanup requirements. The herbicide, and others like it, had regulated REI (re-entry intervals) and DTH (days-to-harvest intervals). In other words, there was a required waiting period between spraying the area and when you can “safely” next set foot on that ground, and another waiting period between when you spray it and when you can “safely” eat something that grew there. Going by the book was what a “good farmer” was supposed to do, but it sure made me think.

That day by the pond was just me with a backpack, but I also learned how to use herbicides on a larger scale. Tractors have a little chart on the dashboard that tell you how fast you are going at certain RPMs in each gear. If you vary the speed, you run the risk of applying too much chemical, which can be harmful, or too little, and your time is wasted. So while driving, you have a switch or lever to start and stop

the pump that forces the fluid out to the nozzles along the boom. If a nozzle becomes clogged, you have to take it off and clean it with the toxic chemical solution present. What do you do with leftovers? What about drift from wind during application? Off-site contamination, harm to non-targeted plants or insects, and harm to the operator are all risks.

About this same time, I was tending the garden behind the farmhouse overlooking said pond, growing a wide array of veggies for my family. It had obviously been the garden patch for previous occupants, overworked like the rest of the farm. I was having trouble with insects damaging the crops, so I sprayed what the trusty guidebooks advised. I strapped on a different backpack sprayer and took care of those pesky critters; problem solved. I was feeling pretty proud of myself, as I had saved our green beans from insect devastation. Later that day, I walked my young daughter out to the edge of the garden and told her we could not go into the garden for two days because I had sprayed bug poison. I had no good answer for her question about the poison on the food, and it was another moment that made me think there had to be a better way. Sure enough, the next year, when I mulched the plot with hay and straw and grass clippings, many of my bug problems went away. And I realized these alternative pest suppression methods could be done economically in small scale farming operations.

While I wrestled with these ideas, the university was conducting research to develop scale-appropriate systems for small-scale, often under-capitalized farmers. One such research trial involved testing various colors of plastic mulch used in tomato production. Of course, as a controlled experiment, these tomato plants were “properly” maintained with regimented insecticides and fungicides. After harvest and evaluation, the tomatoes were shared by the crew. When Doc asked me why I wasn’t taking any of the surplus tomatoes home, I informed him we had plenty of other tomatoes to take home that had not been sprayed, ever.

That set the wheels in motion for KSU to be the first land-grant university in the region to certify some of its land into organic production. Doc gave my team the freedom to design systems for small-scale farmers so they could avoid the use of toxic chemicals. Some 25+ years and a formal recognition from the USDA Secretary of Agriculture later, thousands of farmers, scientists and industry representatives have been challenged to imagine how food can be grown without toxic chemicals at KSU. Turns out my “aha” moments ended up seeding “aha” moments in others.

My conviction to organics originated with personal experience. Applying advice from a previous boss, the path to success was to “have eyes that see, a mind that thinks, and an action attitude.” That’s how I got to keep my job at KSU, that’s how I ended up an organic farmer, and that’s how we provide you with vegetables you can feel good about. —Mac Stone