

Growing, Storing, Eating and Propagating Yacón

Yacón is very easy to grow!

I send out yacón tubers in February, maybe early March, and they have to go out at a time of frost free weather both here in Amsterdam and wherever you are. The tubers are easily killed by frost.

I usually send out larger pieces of tubers, that sometimes have more than one growing tip. Like with seed potatoes, it's possible to cut these into smaller pieces if you want more plants. Just make sure none of the pieces are too small and that each has at least one growing tip.

These tubers must be planted as soon as you get them, protected from frost. Tubers can take a long time to grow, usually between 5-30 days, so if nothing happens right away, have patience... The plants can grow quickly, so be sure to be ready to pot them up or just start them in a large container to start with.

After all risk of frost has passed, plant them out in the garden. The plants are large, about 1,5m high and very bushy. They need about 1m² of their own root space, meaning two yacón plants need to be grown a meter apart. If for example you grow them next to a tomato plant, which I would normally grow 50cm apart, the distance between the yacón and tomato could be averaged to 75cm apart. Be aware yacón can shade nearby plants. The plants might need support from a stake or cane, if you are in a windy area. This is best put into the ground when the plants are young, so you don't unnecessarily damage the roots.

Yacón is tolerant of poor soil, so unless it's really bad you probably don't need to add very much to it. It will be difficult to dig up and harvest if the ground is too hard, so be sure to add some sand or compost to loosen it up if necessary.

After the yacón is killed by the first hard frost, or about November, which ever comes first, cut the tops of the plants to about 20cm. Next, gently dig up the roots. Be careful, because they are easily damaged.

Each plant can yield as much as 10Kg of roots.

Place the dug up plants in a suitable container, perhaps a plastic box or planter, and bring them indoors to a dark and cool place. Leave uncovered for at least the first month, but be sure to keep from drying out. I often lay a towel on the yacón and sprinkle with water from time to time. After the first month, you can cover with peat, dirt, sand, sawdust or whatever if necessary to regulate moisture. Storing the roots for the first month is important, because it helps the roots develop their sugars and makes the taste sweeter.

After the first month in storage, you can eat the larger roots as desired through the winter.

Yacón roots can be eaten raw, peeled if desired. They are nice in stirfrys, and can be cooked gently in butter until the sugars caramelize. You can make syrup and wine. Yacon can even be fermented into something resembling sauerkraut. While the plants are growing, the leaves can be used to make tea.

Starting in February, going until sometime in March, you can cut off the smaller stem tubers for replanting or sending to others. Each plant normally give around 20-50 stem tubers or tuber pieces for replanting.

Sometime in March, the roots will become covered with a grey mold, and will then have to be discarded.