

Check out:

http://www.hungrymonster.com/FoodFacts/Food_Facts.cfm?Phrase_vch=Vegetables&fid=5936

(Reveals the interesting fact that true yams are toxic when uncooked! They must be cooked to be eaten. It also says, "Yams are sold in the United States in chunks, sealed with a wrapping usually made of plastic. Because most varieties of yams are large in size, it is rare to find whole yams in any produce section in North America.")

Bad news. If you are in the US, it is unlikely that you are actually buying true yams unless you are getting them from a specialty store. Even if the product is labeled a "yam".

In doing some online research, I found some interesting facts. The yam and sweet potato are two very different tubers from completely different families. One is grown in the Southern US, and one is indigenous to Africa and Asia and has to be imported to the US. Both can have either deep orange or light orange or even white flesh. To complicate things more, sweet potato growers in the US several decades ago started calling some of their products yams!

From the Cook's Thesaurus:

"yam = moist-fleshed sweet potato *Notes:* Americans use the word "yam" to refer to a sweet, moist, orange-fleshed variety of sweet potato. To everyone else in the world, a yam is what Americans call a [tropical yam](#), a firm tuber with white flesh. Varieties of American "yams" (sweet potatoes) include the **garnet yam** (pictured at left) and the **jewel yam**.

tropical yam = true yam = greater yam = cush-cush = mapuey = yampi = namé = name = nyami = igrname *Notes:* These firm, white-fleshed yams are widely used in tropical countries. They're somewhat bland and dry, so they're often served with spicy sauces."

From an article in the Cincinnati Enquirer:

"Are those yams or sweet potatoes on your Thanksgiving table?"

Unless you bought them at an ethnic grocery, they are sweet potatoes. Although they are a tuber that resembles sweet potatoes, yams are popular in African, South American and Asian cuisines. Very few true yams are grown in this country.

The smaller sweet potatoes always have been more popular in North America. But they were often called "yams" in the South, probably at first by transplanted African slaves.

To make things more confusing, Louisiana sweet potato growers trademarked their products "yams" in the 1930s in an attempt to distinguish them from those tubers grown in the eastern states. This is why you might see a box or can of sweet potatoes labeled "yams." More recently, some members of the produce industry have begun spelling the name of their product "sweetpotatoes" supposedly to distinguish them from plain "potatoes." (Although potatoes, sweet potatoes and yams are all tubers, they are not related.)"

From www.foodreference.com

"The sweet potato is the 6th principal world food crop, and approximately 90 percent of the worlds' crop is grown in Asia.

Vardaman, Mississippi claims to be the Sweet Potato Capital of the World.

North Carolina is the largest producer of sweet potatoes in the nation.

Despite a physical similarity and a frequent confusion with their names, yams and sweet potatoes are not even distantly related. They are in two different botanical families.

Yams are actually related to grasses and lilies

Sweet potatoes are a Native American plant that was the main source of nourishment for early homesteaders and for soldiers during the Revolutionary War. These tuberous roots are among the most nutritious foods in the vegetable kingdom. They are packed with calcium, potassium, and vitamins A and C. This is why one colonial physician called them the "vegetable indispensable." Sweet potatoes are often confused with yams, but yams are large, starchy roots grown in Africa and Asia. **Yams can grow up to 100 pounds and are rarely available in American supermarkets.** Nutritionally, sweet potatoes greatly outweigh yams. Because of the common use of the term "yam," it is acceptable to use this term when referring to sweet potatoes. Sweet potatoes contain an enzyme that converts most of its starches into sugars as the potato matures. This sweetness continues to increase during storage and when they are cooked."

So, despite really good nutritional features, I guess if you are in the US and you are concerned with the sugar, you should probably NOT trust that the thing labeled "yam" at the supermarket is not really a sweet potato and loaded with sugar. As many of the articles I reviewed said, you can't really tell by looking or by the color. Sweet potatoes can also be white. Unless you are shopping at a specialty store or you know for a fact that the vegetable you are buying is truly an imported yam, then you are probably getting a sweet potato. Sorry!