



REDISCOVER your roots

Bring on the succulent adjectives! Mouthwatering, luscious, nutritious, delightful, savory, yummy

Vicki Hayman

It's time to dig into a delicious underground subject: root vegetables!

Introduce new flavors to winter meals with root vegetables; a properly mixed crop of root vegetables not only gives a beautiful harvest of fresh, colorful vegetables but also can set the table with dishes packed with vitamins and other nutrients.

Botanical Facts

Root vegetables are the roots of plants eaten as vegetables. These roots grow into the ground from the base of the plant stem. Root vegetables are divided into six subgroups.

Subgroup	Common varieties
Tubers	Potato, Jerusalem artichoke (sunchoke), yam
Tap roots	Beet, carrot, jicama, parsnip, radish, rutabaga, turnip
Tuberous roots	Sweet potato
Corms	Celeriac (celery root), water chestnut
Rhizomes	Ginger, ginseng, lotus root, turmeric
Bulbs	Garlic, onion, shallot

Why Eat Root Vegetables?

Root vegetables are nutrient-dense treasures. While each root contains its own set of health benefits, they share many of the same characteristics. Root vegetables are full of antioxidants, vitamins C, B, A, potassium, calcium, and iron. They are "starchy vegetables" containing complex carbohydrates, which provide energy for the body. They contain fiber, which makes you feel full, and help regulate blood sugar and the digestive system.

Combine root vegetables in dishes for a healthy and varied mix of nutrients. Because most root vegetables are filling and relatively starchy, they make a great substitute for grain-based dishes like pasta and white rice.

Selecting Root Vegetables

Choose well-developed, firm, fresh-looking, brightly colored root vegetables with no bruises, nicks, or splits. Do not eat greened potatoes, which contain high alkaloid levels. When choosing roots that come with leafy greens (beets, for example), make sure the stems and leaves of the greens are firm and bright.

Storing Root Vegetables

Store root vegetables (except potatoes) loosely covered by plastic in the refrigerator, where they will keep for three to four weeks. Storing them uncovered causes them to soften and quickly go bad. Potatoes are better off in a cool, dry drawer or basket without plastic. Don't refrigerate if using root vegetables within a couple of days of purchase.

Store in a cool, humid environment to keep them for an extended period. A great article on storing is at <http://bit.ly/storingveggies>.

Recommended Daily Amounts of Fruits and Vegetables

One-half cup of sliced root vegetables is about one cupped handful. The amount of fruits and vegetables needed depends on age, gender, and physical activity level. Kids ages 5 to 12 years need 2 ½ to 5 cups per day. Teens and adults ages 13 and up need 3 ½ to 6 ½ cups per day. Visit www.choosemyplate.gov to learn more.

Kitchen Preparation Tips

Scrub root vegetables clean with a brush under cold running water.

Whenever possible, don't peel vegetables because the skins hold

many of their nutrients. For tougher-skinned roots like celeriac, rutabaga, and turnips, remove the peel with a knife. Cut off one end of the root to create a flat surface to keep it steady on the cutting board. Follow the contour of the vegetable with the knife.

Cut the vegetables the same size so they cook at the same rate.

Avoid cooking turnips in aluminum or iron pots. Their flesh contains anthoxanthin pigments that interact with these metals, and the turnips will turn an unattractive grayish color.

Avoid overcooking vegetables. As a rule, vegetables should be just tender when poked with a fork.

Cooking Tips

These long-storing delights are easy to prepare, and they bring warm comfort to your dinner table.

Baked: Root vegetables lend themselves perfectly to being thinly sliced, layered, and baked until tender. For gratin, top them with breadcrumbs and grated cheese.

Braised: Braising yields tender, deeply flavorful root vegetables. Heat a heavy-bottomed pot over medium-high heat, add oil and cubed root vegetables, sprinkle with salt, and pour in ½ to 1 cup broth. Cover, reduce heat to maintain a simmer, and cook until vegetables are

tender and starting to brown. Add fresh herbs at the end for a burst of flavor. Braise vegetables alone or with a stew or meat dish.

Fried: Cutting root vegetables into sticks or thin "chip" slices and frying them works best with the starchier root vegetables like potatoes and sweet potatoes. Root vegetables are also delicious shredded for hash browns.

Grilled: Cook small root vegetables whole; halve or slice bigger root vegetables. Brush slices with a little oil, season, and cook on the grill until grill-marked and tender. Avoid pricking them while they are cooking – this releases their juices and dries them out.

Puréed: Purée cooked vegetables in the blender or food processor. Use purées as a sauce, side dish, or to thicken soups.

Raw: Carrots, beets, radishes, and jicama are good choices for slicing thinly or grating and tossing with salads, slaw, other vegetables, and fruit.

Roasted: Roasting brings out the sweetness in root vegetables and creates a crispy exterior. Chop up the vegetables into even bite-sized pieces, drizzle with olive oil, season with spices, and roast them in a 400°F oven,



turning over midway. Roast root vegetables by themselves or alongside a roast, chicken, or turkey.

Sautéed: This is an easy cooking method. Heat 2 tablespoons olive oil in a large skillet. When it is hot but not smoking, add all vegetables in a single layer. Sauté, moving often with a spatula to keep vegetables from sticking to the pan. When vegetables show crisp edges, begin to brown, and are soft enough to prick easily with a fork, remove from heat. Season and eat.

Steamed/Boiled: Starting with cold water, steam or boil vegetables whole, with the skin. When soft, peel the skin. Mashed celery root, parsnips, turnips, or yams make healthful replacements for mashed potatoes, and any root can be puréed.

Stir-fried: Stir-frying cooks vegetables quickly, so they keep their texture and taste. Cut the vegetables into small, even-sized pieces, add a little oil to a preheated wok or pan and heat until just smoking. Start with the vegetables that need the longest cooking like carrots and keep stirring as they cook. Don't overfill the pan, as they will steam rather than fry. Add sauce at the very end, then toss to coat and serve immediately.

Root vegetables are especially suited to roasting and braising – cooking techniques that intensify the vegetables' natural sweetness. Simmer them in soups and stews, or steam and mash for side dishes. Experiment and discover your favorite cooking methods and flavor profiles!

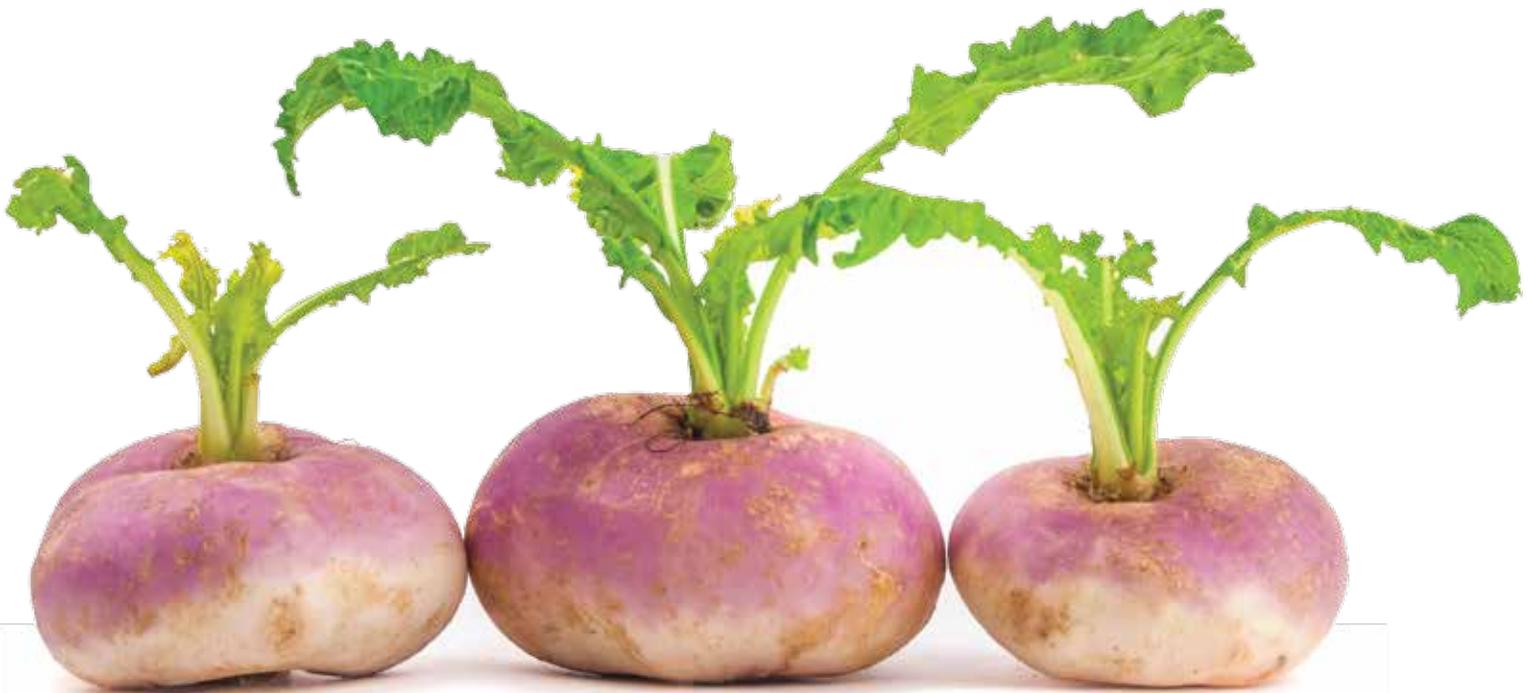
This winter, warm up with a hearty selection of satisfying root vegetables.

For your root vegetable dining pleasure

bit.ly/roots101

www.choosemyplate

And learn more about nutrition and food safety at the UW Extension website <http://www.uwyo.edu/foods/>



We're betting **Vicki Hayman** is enjoying those root vegetables of summer right now. She is the University of Wyoming Extension nutrition and food safety educator based in Weston County but also serving Campbell, Crook, Johnson, and Sheridan counties. She can be reached at (307) 746-3531 or vhayman@uwyo.edu.