

Fresh from the Garden

ROOT VEGETABLES

(BEETS, TURNIPS, RUTABAGA, PARSNIPS)

This lesson concentrates on the more unfamiliar root vegetables--beets, parsnips, turnips and rutabagas. While carrots, onions, and potatoes are delicious and full of nutrients, they are also common and already well accepted.

This lesson may be presented as part of a general overview of root vegetables, or as stand-alone lessons on individual roots.

If presenting two or more root vegetables as one lesson, some duplicated demonstrations and "tastings" may be eliminated.

The material is suitable for both beginning gardeners and gardeners with established productive vegetable gardens.

Use the lesson to:

- Teach about the health benefits of root vegetables.
- Demonstrate how to properly harvest, store, handle, preserve, and healthfully prepare root vegetables.
- Introduce new and/or unfamiliar root vegetables to gardeners.
- Provide more healthful alternatives to traditional cooking techniques or recipes.
- Instruct gardeners how to deal with an overabundant crop.

With minor adaptation, the lesson may be used to introduce the concept of growing root vegetables at home to non-gardeners.

Key presentation points:

1. Nutrition and health benefits associated with roots and other vegetables
2. Importance of eating fruits and vegetables daily.
3. Simple cultivation recommendations
4. Harvesting techniques
5. Washing and storing
6. Healthful cooking/preparation techniques
7. Freezing techniques, if applicable
8. Recipe demonstration (1 or 2)
9. Recipe

Additional (optional) points:

- History or origin
- Cultural information
- Interesting or fun facts

Additional (optional) Activities:

- Compare vegetable name in English with another language appropriate for your audience.
- Taste and compare flavor of different varieties of root vegetables.
- Sample raw root vegetables with a healthful dip.
- Test audiences' knowledge regarding the difference between a fruit and a vegetable, and into which category root vegetables falls.
- Distribute plants or seeds for immediate planting in the garden.

Preparation:

- Review lesson material.
- Review presentation guidelines.
- Review demonstration checklist.
- Review resources for additional presentation information or activities.
- Select seasonal vegetables for demonstration.
- Prepare vegetables for demonstrations, as necessary.
- Prepare recipes or parts of recipes for demonstration and sampling, as necessary.

The following is a suggested script with step-by-step demonstration activities.

PRESENTATION: ROOT VEGETABLES

Introduce yourself and review what you will be presenting with the audience. Discuss the recipe(s) that you will demonstrate.

“It's not difficult to figure out why this group of cool weather vegetables is called root vegetables--the edible part of the plant grows underground and is the plant's root. Most can be grown during warmer months, but they thrive when temperatures drop. An advantage to having roots in your garden is that they can be left in the ground and harvested as needed.”

☞ Display root vegetables with tops and roots intact, if possible

“Beets, carrots, potatoes, and onions are probably the most familiar root vegetables. Of these, potatoes and carrots are probably the most popular.”

☞ Display a variety of root vegetables

“Turnips, parsnips, and rutabagas are the lesser-known roots. Parsnips look like white carrots.”

☞ Display parsnips and compare with carrots

☞ Compare the flavor of parsnips to carrots

Note: If you plan to demonstrate 2 recipes, select 1 that requires cooking and 1 that is served raw. Start the recipe that requires cooking at the beginning of the presentation to allow adequate cooking time. The 2nd recipe may be prepared at or towards the end of the presentation.

It may be necessary to prepare some recipes in advance and reheat them during the presentation, if possible.

“Turnips resemble giant radishes with a cabbage-like flavor.”

☞ Display a turnip and point out the purple color at the top

“Rutabagas are larger than turnips with yellow skin and flesh.”

☞ Display a rutabaga and point out the yellow skin and flesh

☞ Compare the flavor differences between the turnip and a rutabaga

“All root vegetables are low in calories and good sources of fiber.”

☞ Distribute samples of raw, thinly sliced turnips, parsnips, and rutabagas

☞ Encourage the audience to taste raw vegetables

“Beets are an excellent source of folate, and vitamins A and C. Eat the leafy tops—beet greens—for calcium, iron, and more vitamins. While beets have high sugar content, they are still very low in calories.”

☞ Display a beet with leafy greens intact

“Parsnips are high in potassium, a good source of folate, and contain vitamins A and C, as well as some calcium and iron.

Rutabagas and turnips are good sources of vitamins A and C. Leafy green turnip tops are an added nutrient-rich bonus (vitamins A & C), but rutabaga greens are not generally eaten.”

☞ Display turnip greens, if available

“In addition to being root vegetables, turnips and rutabagas are also members of the cabbage or cruciferous vegetable family.”

☞ Compare the flavor of turnips and rutabagas to the cabbage family vegetables

“These vegetables contain important plant substances called phytochemicals, such as sulforaphane, that may protect us against cancer.”

☞ Define phytochemicals and discuss health benefits, if appropriate for the group and time allows. (see “*Nutrition – the basics*” handout for information on phytochemicals)

“All roots should be firm and dense--never soft or flabby.

Harvest roots when they are young and tender – about 2 to 4 inches in diameter for beets and turnips. After harvesting, store beets, parsnips, turnips and rutabagas in the refrigerator in the vegetable crisper, or in a plastic bag. Remove the green tops before storing roots.

Always scrub root vegetables with a brush and rinse with plenty of water, even if you plan to peel them.”

☞ Demonstrate scrubbing technique

“Root vegetables are very versatile and may be roasted, boiled, braised, or steamed. They may be served hot or cold, raw or cooked, pickled or plain. Try young, tender beets, turnips, and parsnips grated in salads. Use turnips and rutabagas as you would potatoes, or serve them thinly sliced as a low calorie dip chip.

A simple way to prepare all root vegetables is to boil or steam them and mash.

To reduce the cooking time for root vegetables, except beets, thinly slice them or cut into small pieces before cooking. This is easier to do, when the vegetable has a flat side and sits firmly on the cutting board. So, cut it in half before slicing.”

☞ Demonstrate cutting technique

Note: Information about individual roots and recipes many be introduced at this point. Include some additional information about each root and demonstrate at least one recipe for each. For additional information, see Beet and Turnip lessons.

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