



ROOT VEGETABLES

Here's an updated version of an article we had in last year's newsletter (Vol 3, Issue 5).

This new version was prepared by

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Beets, turnips, potatoes, carrots, parsnips and sweet potatoes are some of the more common root vegetables. 'Yams,' an orange variety of sweet potatoes, are also a popular choice. Many of these root vegetables are grown locally in BC. Local growing seasons are:

- Beets: July-October
- Carrots: July-November
- Parsnips: August-April
- Potatoes: June-October
- Turnips: May-February

Root vegetables grown in other parts of the world, and imported to B.C., can be purchased year round.

Some ideas for preparing root vegetables:

- Mash together cooked carrots, parsnips and turnips – add a little minced garlic or garlic powder and a dab of butter or non-hydrogenated margarine.
- Toss root vegetables in a little olive oil and balsamic vinegar, add dried rosemary and roast in a 400 degree F oven.
- Make oven fries by cutting sweet or white potatoes into coins or strips, toss with a little olive oil and bake in a 400 degree F oven.
- Add raw grated carrots or carrot coins to salads such as coleslaw or tossed salads.
- Add carrots, parsnips, potatoes and turnips to fall and winter soups.
- Use colourful beets in soups (such as borscht), salads, pickles, or eat them roasted or glazed.

Root Vegetable Nutrition

Canada's Food Guide recommends eating a variety of vegetables and fruit including at least one dark green and one orange vegetable (such as carrots or sweet potatoes) everyday. One cup of root vegetables at a meal is a good portion size for most adults.

Source: "Root Vegetables" by Lori Bryce and Stephanie Bertani. In: *Fresh Choice Kitchens Newsletter*, Volume 4, Issue 4, Fall/Winter 2011. Available at <http://www.communitykitchens.ca/main/?en&NewsletterArchives>

Root vegetables contain carbohydrate, fibre and certain vitamins and minerals. Carbohydrates in root vegetables provide us with energy. Some examples of the vitamins and minerals contained in root vegetables and their functions include:

- Vitamin C which is found in potatoes, turnips and sweet potatoes. It is an antioxidant that may help keep your immune system healthy.
- Beta-carotene is found in sweet potatoes and carrots. It is a precursor of vitamin A, and is an antioxidant that may help reduce the risk of some chronic diseases.
- Niacin is found in potatoes and sweet potatoes. It helps your body get energy from the food you eat.
- Potassium is found in sweet potatoes, potatoes, parsnips, beets, carrots and turnips. It is important for the health of your nerves and muscles, and may help lower blood pressure.

Storing Root Vegetables

Proper storage of root vegetables is needed to prevent spoilage and to maintain quality. See the chart below for storage information.

Vegetable	How to Store	Tips
Beets	3-4 weeks in the fridge	Cut off tops before storing
Carrots-young	2 weeks covered in the fridge	Cut off tops before storing
Carrots-mature	3-4 weeks covered in the fridge	Cut off tops before storing
Parsnips	3-4 weeks in the fridge	
Turnips	1 week in the fridge	
Sweet potatoes	1 week uncovered in a cool, dry, dark area, or 3-4 weeks if it is stored at an ideal temperature of 13-16 °C	
Potatoes-new	1 week in the fridge	Cut off any green area before cooking
Potatoes-mature	1-2 weeks in a paper bag at room temperature; 2-3 months in a cool (7-10 °C), dry, dark area	Cut off any green area before cooking

The taste and nutrition of these vegetables can decline if they are stored longer than the times shown in the chart, but they can still be safe to eat. Vegetables are not safe when they show signs of spoilage such as being moldy, mushy or having black spots. Discard spoiled vegetables.

Root vegetables have a natural protective coating and should not be washed before storing. Before preparing or eating root vegetables, wash them under cold running water, even if you plan to peel them. Use a clean produce brush to scrub vegetables with a hard surface. Discard cut vegetables that have been held at room temperature for longer than 2 hours.

Storing Potatoes

It is important to store potatoes away from natural and artificial light to reduce the production of glycoalkaloid toxin. Greening, sprouting or bruising can indicate that the potato has an increased amount of the toxin. Cutting away green parts, bruises, sprouts, eyes and flowers, and peeling the potato helps reduce the level of toxin. Do not eat a potato that tastes bitter or causes a burning sensation in the mouth. Throw away the potato if it is too green.

Storing mature potatoes at cold temperatures, such as in the refrigerator, causes the starch in the potato to change to sugar. During cooking, the sugar can caramelize, giving the potatoes an unpleasant sweet flavour and brown discoloration. These potatoes are still safe to eat.

Using the basement, garage or cupboard in your home may be suitable for storage of potatoes if it is cool (7-10 °C), dark and dry. Root cellars and cold rooms are also suitable.

Useful Links

For food safety information about buying, storing and washing fresh fruits and vegetables, refer to this link: Handling Produce Safely (Health Canada) <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/secureit/kitchen-cuisine/safety-salubrite/handling-manipulation-eng.php>

For more information about Canada's Food Guide To Healthy Eating (Health Canada) view the link at <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php>

Where can I get more information?

Dietitian Services at HealthLink BC provides free nutrition information and resources for BC residents and health professionals. Go to www.healthlinkbc.ca or call 8-1-1.

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