

BUY FRESH - BUY LOCAL

Food of the Week: Parsnip

History

The parsnip has been a nutritious resource and a major food starch for over 4000 years. Not until the 19th century did the potato become more popular in Europe and America and replaced the parsnip as the major food starch. Today the vegetable is commonly used in soups and stews, but even as a complimentary side dish.

Parsnip Facts

The parsnip is similar in appearance to the carrot except for its light yellow or off white color. Unlike the carrot, the parsnip does not contain beta-carotene, but is a good source of vitamin C. The parsnip has a sweet and nutty flavor with a celery-like aroma.

There are several varieties of parsnips, but the most common is the All American, which has a white flesh and a tender core. Unlike the carrot, the parsnip does not ripen during the warmer season. In fact, the starches in the parsnip are not developed into sugar until the first frost. The colder the ground, the better the parsnip quality. Therefore parsnips are not harvested until late fall, winter, or early spring when the ground is still frozen.

Due to its high quality in cold temperature, the parsnip should be stored at 32° F to 34° F or left in the ground for two months in cold weather. To preserve the moisture of the root, the green tops should be removed.

Parsnips are available year-round, however the supply is lowest during the summer months. The largest producers in the United States are Northern California and Michigan.

When buying parsnips one should pay attention to the packaging. Some packages have fine white lines to enhance the appearance of the parsnip. The parsnip should be smooth, off white in color, and not have an abundance of hair-like rootlets.

Parsnips should be enjoyed cooked due to its fibrous texture. The parsnip is the sweetest when just tender, thus overcooking should be prevented. The vegetable can be either scrubbed or peeled before cooking. After cooking the liquid, into which nutrients from the parsnips have been excreted, could be added to a stock or soup.

Nutrition Information per ½ cup boiled parsnip: Calories: 63, Carbohydrates: 15 g, Fiber: 3 g, Protein: 1 g, Fat: 0 g, Cholesterol: 0 mg, Sodium: 8 mg, Potassium: 286 mg, Vitamin C: 10 mg, Folate: 45 µg

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Recipe of the Week: Mashed Rainbow Potatoes

Makes 4 servings

1 lb (3 medium) potatoes, peeled and cubed
1/2 lb Peeled and chopped parsnip (options, your choice of
beets, broccoli, carrots, zucchini, and pumpkin)
1/4 c Water
1/2 c Skim milk
1 T Margarine (optional)

Place potatoes, vegetables and water in 2-quart microwave dish covered with plastic wrap. Microwave on high power 8 to 9 minutes, let it stand for 3 minutes. Remove plastic wrap; add milk and margarine. Mash with potato masher, leaving vegetable texture.

Nutrition analysis per serving: Calories: 174 kcal, Carbohydrate: 34 g, Fiber: 4 g, Protein: 4 g, Fat: 3 g, Cholesterol: <1 mg, Sodium: 60 mg, Potassium: 632 mg, Calcium: 68 mg, Vitamin A: 47 RE, Vitamin C: 16 mg, Folate: 45 µg

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