

Don't "Turnip" Your Nose to Winter Vegetables

The start of a new year also signals that Fall is officially out and we are in the thick of winter. No more farmer's markets that boast an array of seasonal summer produce. Usually we can still find some of our summer favorites in the grocery store, but they are typically grown in a greenhouse or shipped from thousands of miles away. The freshness and flavor seem to dissipate in these conditions so why not keep it local, seasonal, and fresh?

Winter veggies are the way to go. Not only because they are seasonal and packed full of flavor,



but they are also super healthy! They include root vegetables like potatoes, turnips, parsnips, carrots and beets and allium vegetables like onion, garlic, and shallots, as well as cruciferous veggies like cabbage, Brussel sprouts, broccoli, and cauliflower. And don't forget those hardy greens like kale, spinach, chard and last but not least winter squash and pumpkins!

Most of us are familiar with many of these seasonal treats, as they have been staples in our homes for centuries. But what about those that are less familiar to us? Let's explore the winter vegetables that we may be less acquainted with and that we may have previously turned our noses up to. Take for instance Brussel sprouts. I don't know many people that love these tiny cabbage look-alikes, but believe it or not it is probably how it has been prepared in the past that has influenced your decision. There are so many ways to cook Brussel sprouts that make them down right delicious and so worth the effort! One serving has all the Vitamin K you need for the day which helps fight inflammation, supports bone growth, and the cardiovascular system. My favorite way to enjoy these little guys is to cut them in half, toss them in a Ziploc bag with a splash of balsamic vinegar, olive oil, salt and pepper. Place them on a tray and bake at 425 until tender. Seriously delicious!

How about some parsnips? According to food experts they are versatile and can be used in place of potatoes and carrots in any recipe. They also have less starch than a potato so for those watching their waistline, parsnips can be a great replacement. Did I mention they are packed full of Vitamin C and folate? So roast them, bake them, or puree them into a mash.

Last but not least, the winter squash and pumpkins. These are chock-full of beta carotene which converts to Vitamin A. Studies have shown that diets high in this nutrient are linked to lower mortality. I recommend cooking them in their outer shell, since they can be a pain to cut and peel. It makes for a quick and easy removal and clean up. In fact, sometimes you can find them already cut and diced for you. Be sure to buy the smaller cooking pumpkins though. Their flesh is firmer and they are sweeter than other varieties of pumpkins. They are also a lot less stringy, slimy, and wet. You can just cut them in half, scoop out the seeds and place them in a crock pot for 2-3 hours or until your fork pierces through the skin. From there, scoop out the flesh for homemade pumpkin puree or to add to soups, muffins, or use it to cut the tomato sauce and make a less acidic homemade marinara sauce. Need a replacement for pasta? Try spaghetti squash.

So start the New Year fresh with seasonal veggies and make a roasted feast of new potatoes, onion, garlic, parsnips, carrots and Brussel sprouts topped with fresh dill, and rosemary. Feeling more like soups on a cold and chilly day? Toss any of these amazing winter vegetables into a crock pot and simmer all day with a container of low sodium broth. Then puree it and add a little cream to make a fantastic winter soup. Serve with bread or your favorite winter salad. May I suggest adding some red or green cabbage to your winter salad mix? Whatever you do, I encourage you to embrace these nutrient-rich vegetables this season.