

PENNY SAVER NEWS

FAX: 932-5261

Jan 21, 2010

BY: Mary A. Keith, Ph.D., L.D.
Food, Nutrition and Health Agent

HILLSBOROUGH COUNTY

5339 S. County Road 579

Seffner, FL 33584-3334

PH:(813)744-5519 x 136, FAX:744-5776
e-mail:mkeith@ufl.edu

Kohlrabi?

Can you describe a kohlrabi? Can you name the round, root-like thing in the produce section that looks like a round turnip with leaves sticking out the sides?

They're in the markets now. They seem to have survived our freezing weather. If you couldn't name it, don't feel bad, most people can't do it either. But that's unfortunate, because kohlrabi are nutritious, very low in calories, fat free, high in several vitamins and minerals, and have a decent amount of fiber too.

Kohlrabi seems determined to defy easy description. While it looks like a smooth turnip it's actually related to cabbage. It tastes rather like mild broccoli. And while the round part looks like a root, it's actually an enlarged, bulb-like stem. The leaves sprout from the sides of the bulbous stem. But it's not a bulb like a tulip bulb. It grows above ground, not in it. Some varieties are greenish, others have a purple tinge to the skin.

Both the bulb and the leaves are edible, and can be eaten raw or cooked. The leaves tend to be a little tough as the plant ages, so many people prefer to cook the leaves unless they get a very young and tender plant. Taste a leaf. If it's tender enough for your liking, you can just shred or chop the leaves and add them to a salad. If it's too tough for a salad, the leaves can be shredded or chopped, then steamed, sautéed, boiled or added to soups. Season with garlic or onion powder, salt and pepper, a little Worcestershire or soy sauce, vinegar or lemon juice, whatever you like.

The bulb/stem from a young kohlrabi will be sweeter than that from an older

plant. If it's tender you can just chop it up. Bigger and older ones have a tougher skin. If it's more than 3 inches across it probably should be peeled before use. With its high water content, kohlrabi is rather crisp, but not hard. It can be grated coarsely or cut in matchstick pieces to add some crunch to salads, rather like a jicama or water chestnut. It tastes like a crispy cabbage or broccoli, but very mild.

If you prefer to cook it, kohlrabi can be steamed or boiled and served with salt and pepper or a salt-free herb blend. Slices can be added to stir-fry mixtures too. They're mild enough to blend with other sauces without overpowering them. If you don't cook it too long kohlrabi will stay crisp, not mushy.

Why bother trying kohlrabi? For starters, like many vegetables in the cabbage family, kohlrabi is an excellent source of vitamin C. Besides being a good antioxidant to help protect our systems from many assaults, vitamin C speeds healing. A bruise won't get so big, a cut will heal faster if you have enough vitamin C in your system.

A whole cup of boiled or steamed kohlrabi has only 48 calories and 11 g of carbohydrates, a cup of raw slices has only 27 calories. That's enough to fit into just about any diet! It's low in sodium and high in potassium, a very good combination for managing our blood pressure. It has a little calcium and a bit of iron, although we often don't absorb these minerals from plant sources very well.

If you get a good deal at the produce market, you can freeze kohlrabi now for use later. Peel if necessary, then cut the bulb part into ½ inch cubes. Blanch for 3 minutes in boiling water, chill, drain, package and freeze.

Probably the simplest way to cook kohlrabi is a simple sauté. Choose ones about the size of tennis balls so you won't need to peel them. Wash and slice thinly.

Slice an onion too. Melt a bit of margarine in a skillet. Add the onion and kohlrabi and cook and stir until they're tender. Season with salt and pepper, or with a salt-free herb blend of your choice. Or try the sweet sour slaw recipe. Use white vinegar to keep the kohlrabi looking nice and white, cider or balsamic vinegar will make it dark and drab.

Sweet Sour Kohlrabi Slaw

1 pound small kohlrabi

1 carrot

1 Tbsp vinegar

1 Tbsp equivalent low cal sweetener

salt to taste

½ tsp celery seed optional

Grate the kohlrabi and carrots coarsely. Sprinkle with sweetener, vinegar and celery seed, toss to distribute evenly. If desired, salt to taste. Serves 4.