

PENNY SAVER NEWS

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Put Some Parsnips on Your Plate

What looks like a rough, white carrot but tastes more like a sweet potato? Could you name a parsnip? If so, good for you! Depending on where your family traditions come from, parsnips might always be on your holiday plates. Certainly our ancestors from Europe grew up eating parsnips. They were always on the Christmas or New Year's tables. Nowadays they're not so common, but during our Colonial era parsnips were much more likely to be on the plate or in the pot than potatoes were. If you haven't tried any recently, it's time to meet a new old friend.

Parsnips look like thick white or pale yellowish carrots. They're not as even as a carrot, but thicker at the top and then much thinner at the bottom. And parsnips are much sweeter. Centuries ago mashed parsnips were used to sweeten cakes and even jam. How about some strawberry-parsnip jam? So even if your children won't eat carrots, they may well decide they like parsnips.

Parsnips are much more versatile than carrots. Yes, you can boil them or put them in stew. Once boiled, they are delicious mashed. But mashed parsnips are very much sweeter than mashed potatoes, without needing added sugar. Or you can peel and roast them in chunks, or slice them thinly, parboil them and bake into chips. Baked carrot chips are not very common.

You're much more likely to see parsnips in the produce section this time of year than in the summer. They need a good frost to make them sweet, so fall and winter are their best seasons. The cold tells the parsnips to start changing their starch into sugar. Many growers will harvest them, then hold them in cold storage for several weeks just to be sure they get enough cold to be sweet. If you get some that aren't very sweet though, keeping them in your refrigerator won't help much. Parsnips need temperatures of 32° F to 34° F to sweeten up, and that is too cold for home refrigerators. It would damage a lot of your other fruits and vegetables.

Besides being sweeter than carrots or potatoes, parsnips are also nutritious. You might think that all they have is starch and sugar, but they are good sources of fiber and the B vitamin folate. A parsnip has more than double the fiber of a potato, but less overall carbohydrate, and more fiber than a carrot too. Fiber helps keep the bacteria in our guts happy. They then protect the lining of the

colon and intestine from cancer. Fiber slows down the conversion of starch into sugar during digestion. For people with diabetes that is very good news. Their blood sugar won't go up as fast or as high.

Among root vegetables, parsnips have one of the very highest amounts of folate. Only arrowroot and dried radishes have more, and how long has it been since you ate those? Folate is a B vitamin essential for our nervous systems, first to develop and then to function. Women who might get pregnant should be very careful about getting enough folate to ensure that their baby's nervous system develops properly.

Parsnips are also a better source of potassium than many vegetables, which means they're better at keeping our blood pressure under control. They have more potassium than bananas do too. Plus magnesium, iron, copper and even some calcium. And while many antioxidants are found in brightly colored fruits and veggies, plain old white parsnips are very good sources of several that we don't usually get from other foods.

It's easy to mix parsnips in with carrots or potatoes to boil and mash. That's often the simplest way to introduce them to your family. They're also great included in any soup or stew, from leftover turkey to lamb or lentil. And peeled and chunked parsnips can be added to any pan of vegetables for roasting. This recipe adds a touch of maple syrup and enough thyme to balance the sweetness. If it's too late to serve with the turkey, consider it for next week. Enjoy!

Roasted Maple Parsnips

3 lbs combination of parsnip, carrot and sweet potato 2 Tbsp maple syrup
4 sprigs fresh thyme olive oil, salt and pepper to taste

Peel vegetables and cut into long, thick slices. Preheat oven to 375° F. Toss vegetable slices in a little oil, then sprinkle with salt and pepper. Scatter on a large cookie sheet and bake until starting to soften, about 30 minutes. Remove from oven, drizzle with syrup and sprinkle with thyme leaves. Return to oven to bake another 15 minutes or until tender. Serves 4.

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