

Turnip: *Brassica rapa Rapifera*

HISTORY

The turnip was first developed by prehistoric man around two thousand years ago for its enlarged root. It is difficult to trace its origins to an exact location, but it is believed to have first been cultivated in Northeastern Europe or Western Siberia, though counter evidence exists.

CHARACTERISTICS

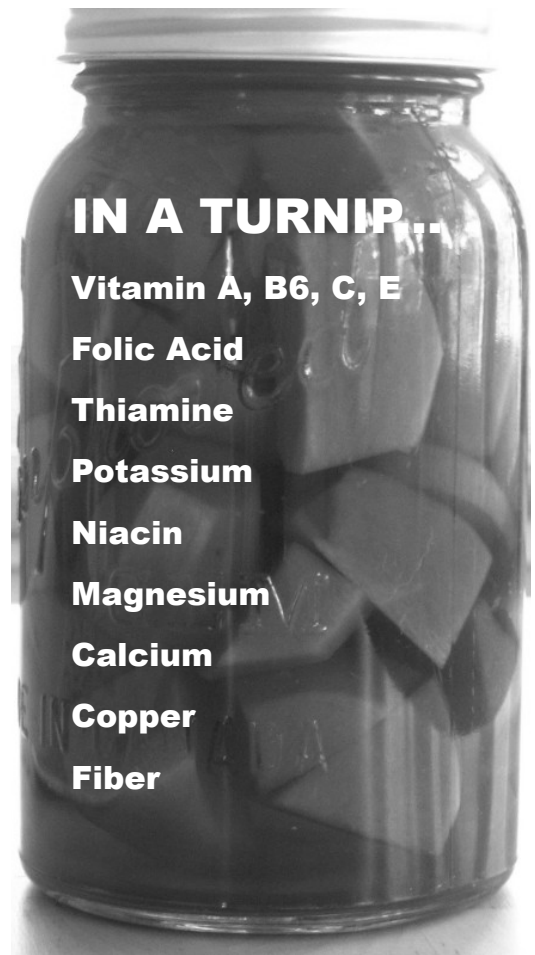
The turnip is a cool season biennial, grown primarily as an annual. What this means to the gardener is that you plant a turnip in the late spring or early fall to avoid the summer heat, which causes the plant to bolt, rather than produce a root. They generally take around two months to grow and can handle a frost exceeding well. A biennial is one that produces an excess of energy one year so that the following spring, it can put energy into flowering early. If planted in the proper rotation, you can enjoy turnip greens and turnip roots for the entire year round.

THE TURNIP

THERE are two main uses for the turnip.

1 Use the young, tender greens. When harvesting the leaves, you want to make sure that you leave enough so that the plant can continue to photosynthesize, ensuring root production. Pinch several medium sized leaves of each plant, wash (flea beetles love turnip leaves, so there will be holes) them with cold water, then either eat them raw in a salad or cook them as you would any other braising green.

2 Dig up the root. When choosing your turnips, make sure that you choose a globe that is about two inches or less in diameter. Anything much larger than this begins to taste very woody and tough. I recommend that you get them when they are small. The best tasting turnip will be achieved if you plant late and then leave them in the ground so they are exposed to a few freezing temperatures. The cold will have turned some the starch into sugar, making the turnip much more sweet and delicious. In the store or at the market, just look for the size as your primary indicator. Also, to the touch they should be firm, but not woody.



TURNIP



PRESERVATION & RECIPES

*STORING: Root crops such as turnips can be stored in the soil over winter. All this requires is that you put some insulation such as straw above the crop so that it remains frozen once frozen. If you are going to store them in a cellar of sorts, then pull the turnip out of the ground, cut the leaf matter off about one inch above the root, wash them, and then allow the turnips to dry. Place them in a crate that has some moist peat moss or sawdust with temperatures around 32 to 40 F. This should allow them to keep for 3-5 months.

*FREEZING: Take your turnips, wash, peel, and then cut them into small cubes, about the size you would want for a stew. Blanch them for 2 minutes and then drop them in ice water. Drain, package, seal, label, and then throw them in the freezer.

*CANNING: Not many sources, including the Blue Book of Canning, recommend canning turnips. If you have a large source of turnips that you need to use, it is best either compost them or to keep a fattening pig. Boil the turnips overnight, then feed them to the pigs.

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From my experience, turnips can be a very difficult vegetable to cook with, though they are worth the effort. Unlike potatoes, if the consistency isn't just right, the taste will be greatly effected. The trick is to make sure that they are young and tender, because if they are even a little too old, the taste can only be described as "turnipey".

Even still, they are a perfect substitute or companion flavor to any dish that has potatoes in it.

TURNIP, CARROT, & POTATO HASH

Ingredients:

1 turnip

1 onion

3 carrots

3 potatoes

8 oz. Beef Consomme

1. Chop all the vegetables up.
2. Place them in a medium saucepan and add the consomme. Bring the mixture to a boil on high heat.
3. Once it is at a boil, reduce the heat to medium low and simmer the vegetables until they are tender or until most of the liquid is gone.
4. Transfer the meal into a medium sized baking pan, spreading butter across the top, and then place that into the oven at 400.
5. Bake for 15-20 minutes or until golden brown.