

An original post written for Kraft-what's cooking blog:



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Taproots and Tubers, great autumn side dishes

Posted by What's Cooking team, October 12th, 2011

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In culinary circles, the term "root vegetable" often applies to all types of veggies that grow underground, including bulbs such as onions and garlic. But for our purposes here today we are going to focus on the true roots (according to botanists); taproots and tubers. What is so great about these types of vegetables is that they are very hearty and persistent; they outlast many of their surface growing counterparts and are usually easy to procure well into autumn. They are a great veggie to turn to in the fall when you are looking for inspiration in the fresh and locally sourced side-dish department.

Let's break it down:

Taproots: These root vegetables are the usually long, pointy ones. The most obvious one is the carrot, but the group also includes: beets, radishes, turnips and parsnips.

Tubers: There are two types of tubers, *stem* and *root*; they are defined as part of a plant that enlarges to store nutrients. You may be surprised to learn that the potato (the most commonly known tuber) is actually a stem and not a root tuber. They tend to grow close to the surface and even above ground. The root tuber category includes sweet potatoes, yams, and cassavas (also as known as the yuca or manioc). Interestingly enough sweet potatoes and yams, though the terms are often used interchangeably, are actually two distinct vegetables. Sweet potatoes are lighter skinned and have a pale yellow flesh and are ironically less sweet than the darker skinned, orange-fleshed yam.

Preparation: There are probably thousands of ways that you can prepare taproots and tubers, but my favourite is oven roasting them. The prep time is minimal, and the taste of roots is really accentuated by this method of cooking.

What is your favourite root veggie? And how do you like to prepare them?

The Research Team

Keywords : Fresh, local produce, potatoes, root vegetables, side-dish, sweet potato, yams