

Seasonal Eating
Whitney Danhof, Extension Agent

Parsnips: A Winter Jewel
February 2012

Sweet, nutty, starchy and full of flavor, the parsnip is a jewel of the winter vegetables. Brought to America by the first settlers from Europe, it has not become a well-known and used vegetable here as the potato reigns supreme in most American kitchens. However, you will be amazed by this flavorful powerhouse and the versatility it brings to your winter dishes.

So what is a parsnip? It is long and white and looks like a creamy colored carrot. They are often sold in bags like carrots as well. Parsnips are related to carrots, parsley and celery. These are the ideal winter vegetable because their starch turns to sugar after the first frost. If you are growing them yourself, wait until after the first frost to harvest. Mulched well, they can be stored in the ground all winter and picked as needed. When choosing parsnips, look for firm ones without large blemishes or pits. Large parsnips may have a woody core that you will want to trim out, but smaller ones are usually tender. Mostly parsnips are used peeled, but will turn dark (like potatoes) once cut or peeled so prepare just before using or coat with an acidic mixture.



Parsnips go well with the Sunday Pot Roast, cooked in the broth with the traditional potatoes, carrots and onions. They can be used in chicken pot pies and stews as well. Cooked and pureed with carrots, parsnips make a creamy soup. You can also sauté them in a little butter with herbs or glaze them like carrots. Boiled, drained and mashed they can stand in for traditional mashed potatoes or can be combined with other mashed vegetables like turnips, potatoes or carrots. You can also use parsnips raw, cutting them into sticks for dip or shredding to use in a slaw mixture. One of my favorite ways to cook parsnips is to roast them. Cut them into sticks and coat with a little olive oil, salt and pepper and roast at 400 degrees for about 30 -40 minutes. The Maple Roasted Parsnips are coated with maple syrup and bacon fat so they roast at a little lower temperature to prevent the syrup from burning. You can mix them with carrots or make them alone. Either way they are delicious. So pick up some parsnips next time you're at the store and try a new addition to your winter vegetable dishes.

For more ideas on using seasonal produce, visit the Bedford County Extension website Seasonal Eating page. The Seasonal Eating Cooking Demonstration on Hot and Hearty Dishes, including a Chicken Pot Pie with Parsnips and Beef and Mushrooms Braised in Red Wine with an easy Cherry Cobbler for dessert, will be held on February 15 at 12:00 noon at the Extension Office. Call the Extension Office at 684-5971 to sign up and bring \$5.00 to cover the samples.

Maple Roasted Parsnips

- 4 slices bacon
- 2 tablespoons pure maple syrup
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 1/8 teaspoon black pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon fresh thyme, roughly chopped
- 3 parsnips

Slice the bacon crosswise into 1/2" pieces. Cook the bacon in a small skillet until browned and crisp. Remove the bacon with a slotted spoon to a paper towel to drain. Measure 1 tablespoon of the bacon drippings into a medium bowl. Add syrup, salt, pepper and thyme and mix well. Wash and peel the parsnips. Cut into about 3" long sticks that are all about the same thickness (like French fries). Toss in the bowl with the syrup and stir to coat. Pour out onto a parchment lined baking sheet in a single layer. Bake at 350 degrees for 20 minutes. Stir the parsnips and return to oven for another 20-25 minutes until tender and caramelized. Sprinkle with reserved bacon and serve.