

Don't Throw Away Those Greens

When you receive your share, most of the root vegetables come with the greens still attached: carrots, radishes, turnips, beets, rutabagas (fall veggie). Don't throw them away. Do cut the greens off the root right away. As long as the greens are still attached to the root, the plant is still alive. It will try to stay alive by drawing moisture out of the root. That's what the root is for—it is the storage part of the vegetable, meant to sustain the plant when food and water are scarce. If the greens are left on, the root tends to go soft. It is not bad at that point, but it doesn't look real appetizing either. Even though they are drawing water and nutrients from the root, the greens aren't getting enough to survive, so they quickly get wilted and then start to decompose. This is the reason you don't usually see root vegetable with the greens attached in the grocery store. As a result we have lost the knack for cooking and eating these greens.

But there is a reason for eating those greens! Actually two. The first is that they are tasty and the second is that they are nutritious. Some green, such as turnips, are more nutritious than the root.

Beet Greens:

The greens attached to the beet roots are delicious, tasting like a cross between spinach and beets themselves. They can be prepared like spinach or Swiss chard. They are incredibly rich in nutrients, concentrated in vitamins and minerals as well as carotenoids such as beta-carotene and lutein/zeaxanthin.

Turnip Greens:

Turnip greens have a flavor slightly reminiscent of turnip themselves. Some people find them to have a slightly bitter flavor. (This bitterness diminishes with cooking.) Researchers have linked the bitter taste of turnip greens to their calcium content. On an ounce-for-ounce basis, turnip greens contain about four times more calcium than much less bitter-tasting cruciferous vegetables like cabbage. Even in comparison to mustard greens, turnip greens contain about twice the calcium content. High calcium content is not the only reason for the bitterness of turnip greens, of course. But it may be an important contributing factor. While the commercial food industry has sometimes tried to breed out the bitter-tasting constituents from turnip greens, this practice doesn't make sense if you want to maximize your nourishment from this cruciferous vegetable. A much healthier approach would be the use a recipe and cooking method that brings out the delicious potential of turnip greens in a flavor-blended way.

Carrot Tops

rich in protein, minerals and vitamins. The tops of the carrots are loaded with potassium which can make them bitter, as well as vitamin K which is not present in the carrots themselves. Carrot greens are antiseptic, so they have been added to mouthwashes and, mixed with honey, to disinfect sores. They are also diuretic (increase urine flow), and can help treat kidney disease and edema.

Radish Greens

Radish leaves contain almost six times the vitamin C content of their root and are also a good source of calcium. They have a flavor similar to the radish itself, but the texture can be a little off-putting. For this reason, radish leaves are usually eaten cooked.

Preparing those Greens

The green tops of root vegetables will work in almost any recipe that uses greens. The flavor differs from green to green, but the cooking process is the same. They work well in soups or stews. Carrot greens can be chopped up and added to a salad as can baby beet greens and baby turnip greens. Carrot greens can be dried like herbs then crumbled and sprinkled over baked potatoes or scrambled eggs. These greens also work well in green smoothies.