**Turnip Tidbits**

*September 2018*

1. **What is a Turnip**
2. The turnip, or white turnip, is a root vegetable commonly grown in temperate climates worldwide and is about the size of an apple. It’s white at the bottom, with a light purple blush around the top, which appears when the plan has been exposed to the sunlight.
3. It comes from the *Brassicaceae* family. The word turnip is a compound of ***tur-*** as in turned/rounded and ***neep-*** the latin word for plant.
4. Small varieties are grown for human consumption and larger varieties are grown as feed or livestock.
5. Turnips thrive best in cold weather and grown up to 2 feet tall. You can buy them all year long but enjoyed best during fall and spring, when they are small and sweet.
6. Turnips taste bland, like a cross between a carrot and a potato. However, there are plenty of ways to eat them. You can either add them raw to your salads or mix them with cherry tomatoes and olives to make a delicious appetizer. You can also mix them in stews along with vegetables like potatoes, carrots, and kohlrabi.
7. **History of the Turnip**
8. This vegetable has been around a lot longer than you think – about 4,000 years – brought by the early Europeans and settlers. Animals fed on the turnips for at least 600 years when it was first brought over to the United Kingdom.
9. The turnip is known as a vegetable crop that terrorized Romans and helped industrialize England. It was used by Romans to throw at unpopular people and became a crop that many disliked.
10. It was the primary food eaten by the very poor of the country folks in ancient Greece and Rome. When the upper class did eat the turnips, they masked the taste by seasoning it with cumin or honey.
11. During the Civil War, a turnip is what drove Scarlett O’Hara to shake her fist at the heavens and swear that she’d never be hungry again – the implication being that only the starving would stoop to the awful level of turnips.
12. During World War 1, German civilians – due to failed potato harvest and bread shortages – were reduced to living almost wholly on turnips, a situation which pleased no one.
13. This happened again in World War 11 when British civilians also reluctantly turned to turnips.
14. The crowning glory of wartime turnip cuisine was Woolton Pie, a dish invented by a master chef in London’s Savoy Hotel. (A pastry dish loaded with vegetables that were in season or were available and some oatmeal – Kind of like a vegetable “pot pie”)
15. On the other hand, turnips also had their glory days. During the 18th century, the turnip was eventually promoted as a key player in a four-field system of crop rotation along with wheat, barley, and clover. The result was a spectacular boom in food production and fields no longer had to lay fallow. The clover provided the much-needed dose of nitrogen to the soil and turnip – which could be stored over the winter – provided enough animal food so farmers were no longer compelled to slaughter all of the livestock in November, thus increasing the availability of milk and meat through the winter months making food production more efficient. The modern world was “built on turnips.”
16. **Nutrition & Health Benefits of Turnips**
17. The Turnip root is a great source of minerals, antioxidants, and dietary fiber so they are believe to offer a wide variety of health benefits to the body. It also is very low in calories if you’re watching your weight.
18. On cup of cooked turnips only has 34 calories, 3.1 grams of fiber, and 7.89 grams of carbohydrate. It is loaded with Vitamin C, manganese, potassium, Vitamin B6, folate, and copper.
    1. Vitamin C is essential for your body to produce collagen, scavenge free radicals, and fight against inflammation.
19. The high fiber content in turnips will help lower the risk of intestinal problems such as colorectal cancer and diverticulitis. Eating high fiber foods can help to reduce diverticulitis “flare-ups” because the fiber absorbs the water in the colon making bowel movements easier to pass.
20. Turnips can also help with lowering blood pressure with the potassium it contains and dietary nitrates – both provide vascular benefits.
21. The antioxidants found in turnips can also help to reduce the risk of some cancers. The Sulforaphane compound, found in turnips, has shown promising results in some studies suggesting that it may help reduce of risk of melanoma, esophageal, prostate, and pancreatic cancers.
22. It’s not just the root part of the vegetable that is beneficial. The turnips are just as, if not better, nutritious.
    1. Turnip greens are rich in antioxidants like vitamin A, vitamin C, lutein, zeaxanthin, and betacarotene. (ALL benefits to the eyes and preventing macular degeneration.)
    2. They also have vitamin K – a direct regulator of the inflammatory response, and omega-3 fatty acids, which are building blocks for your body’s anti-inflammatory molecules.
    3. Other nutrients in the greens are folate, calcium, potassium, magnesium, as well as riboflavin, pyridoxine, pantothenic acid, thiamin, copper, manganese, and iron.
23. **Planting, Selecting, and Storing Turnips**
24. Turnips like cool weather and the sweetness is greatly enhanced by exposure to hard frosts. They like soil rich in potassium and phosphorus, but not nitrogen.
    1. Adding bone meal and wood ashes to the soil before planting increases the potassium and phosphorus in the soil.
25. Turnips can be planted in the early spring for a spring crop and midsummer through early fall for a fall to winter crop.
    1. Turnips that are harvested while young and small (2-3 inches in diameter) will have a sweet, mild flavor. As they continue to grow or age, the flavor gets spicier, and the texture will become rough and woody.
    2. Turnip greens and small turnips can be harvested about 30 days after seeding.
26. When buying turnips in the stores, choose those that are small and heavy for their size. Choose ones that have smooth skin, sweet aroma, and crisp green tops.
    1. Look for green tops that are brightly colored and fresh. You can use the greens for cooking or in a salad.
27. Like other root vegetables, turnips are a great storage vegetable that you can stock before winter arrives. Store turnips in a cool, dim area, similar to potatoes, and wash, trim, and peel them before use.
28. If you plan on using the tops, cut off the leaves, bag them separately and refrigerate them to use within a few days. Refrigerate unwashed roots in a plastic bag and they should keep for 1-2 weeks.
29. To freeze them, wash, peel, slice, and place in a pot of water that just covers them. Bring the water just to the boiling point, then drain water off. Dump them into a sink of very cold water, then drain again, pack in freezer bags, and freeze.
30. It has a great crunch and texture, so you want to make sure you don’t overcook it.
31. **Turnip Fun Facts**
32. The traditional “Jack-O-Lantern” in Ireland was a turnip, not a pumpkin that was used to ward off evil spirits. (***see attached picture of turnip Jack-O-Lantern)***
33. Don’t throw away the leafy green tops – they are actually more nutritious than the roots, as they’re loaded with vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants.
34. The turnip can actually help your personal hygiene…turnip juice is actually effective in warding off body odor. Grate a turnip squeeze out the juice and apply to your underarms! :D
35. Turnips may help mend cracked and torn skin on your feet (must be because of the Vitamin C!) Try this one out – boil 12 turnips, including their greens, in water and before bedtime, soak your feet in the cooled solution for 10 minutes. It can help heal and prevent “odor”!
36. In the Middle East, people would often people turnips.
37. Because turnips are so hardy, they were often considered a food source for the poor and needy. Aristocrats refused to eat them. Even today, they’re considered a “humble” vegetable.

