

# Everyday I'm Brusselin'

October 2019

## I. What is the Brussels Sprout?

- A. When first glancing at a Brussels sprout you may think it looks strikingly similar to a head of cabbage, only much, much smaller. In the case of this tiny nutritional powerhouse, your eyes are not playing tricks on you.
- B. The *Brassica Oleracea*, or Brussels sprout, is a member of the cabbage family and is grown for its edible buds.
- C. The edible buds of the Brussels sprout plant are made of compact leaves, layered on top of one another to form a circular shape much like a head of cabbage. (**Show picture of Brussels sprout & layers of leaves**)
- D. As members of the cabbage family, Brussels sprouts share common plant relatives such as mustard and horseradish
- E. Much like mustard, horseradish, and cabbage, Brussels sprouts have a reputation of having a very strong, sometimes bitter flavor.
  - a. However, this is only true if the sprouts are harvested over-ripe, or if they are overcooked in preparation.  
(More on harvesting and cooking tips later!)
- F. They are native to the European region, getting their name from the area they were first recorded, Brussels Belgium.
- G. Brussels sprouts have gained popularity because they can be used in endless cuisines and are prepared using many different techniques
  - a. Historically Brussels sprouts were prepared by roasting, most likely over a fire, and seasoned with butter and European spices.
- H. In its seedling stage the Brussels sprout plant looks almost identical to a cabbage plant, however as the main stem grows it reaches a height of three-four feet!

- a. The edible buds of the Brussels sprout plant burst out from main stem near harvest and a single plant can produce 30 or more sprouts.
- I. Although we may think of Wisconsin climate as similar to that of Central Europe, Brussels sprouts can be difficult to grow in Wisconsin due to our late springs and early falls.
  - a. Brussel sprouts grow best in a climate with mild winters and a longer growing season, especially since the plant is bi-annual and will winter over if its root survives until spring.

## II. **History of Brussels Sprouts**

- A. Plant members of the cabbage family have been relied on for nutrition for thousands of years as they are able to grow in very harsh and cold climates.
  - a. Brussels sprouts thrive in soil high in salt and limestone, making them a reliable food source in even the harshest conditions.
  - b. Members of the *Brassica* (cabbage) family started as a single plant which scientists believe resembled kale. This original ancestor was then selectively bred over thousands of years into different varieties of the cabbage family such as broccoli, cauliflower, wasabi, horseradish, kohlrabi, and of-course Brussels sprouts!
- B. Brussels sprouts are believed to have been grown in Brussels, Belgium as early as 1200 A.D, but the first written record of the plant dates to 1587 A.D.
- C. Brussels sprouts made their way to America in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when French settlers brought them to Louisiana.
  - a. From Louisiana Brussel Sprouts found their way to coastal areas of California where an ideal combination of coastal fog and cool temperatures allow the crop to be harvested from June through January.

## III. **Nutrition & Health Benefits of Grapes**

- A. Brussels sprouts is an excellent source of vitamin C containing 102% of the recommended daily value, and an excellent source of vitamin K containing 169% of the recommended daily value.
  - a. High levels of Vitamins C and K make Brussels sprouts a great food for building immunity (vitamin C) and strengthening bones (Vitamin K).
  - b. Brussels sprouts also contain moderate amounts of B vitamins such as folate and vitamin B6.
- B. A cup of Brussels sprouts contains an impressive 11 grams of healthy carbohydrates and 4 grams of protein.
- C. Brussels sprouts and other green vegetables of the cabbage family are rich in sulphoraphane (sulfur-a-fain)
  - a. This chemical provides a rich green color to fruits and vegetables in which it's found and is being studied for its possible use in preventing heart disease and reducing high blood pressure.
- D. In European folk medicine, Brussels sprout leaves were used to treat inflammation. A paste was made of mashed leaves from the sprout and placed on affected areas to reduce discomfort.
  - a. A paste made from the sprouts has also been used in European folk medicine to treat pain in breastfeeding women.

#### **IV. Selection, Storage, Handling of Brussel's Sprouts**

- A. When shopping for Brussels sprouts be sure that the bud has a small, tight head, without leaves that are unraveling or wilting. Avoid mushy or drab green and yellow buds, as this indicates they are not fresh or have started to spoil.
- B. . Once purchased preparation begins by chopping the stalk from the base of each bud.

- a. Once the stalk is removed peel any excess or loose leaves and discard, leaving a clean intact bud ready to cook.
- C. After cleaning the buds you can choose a cooking method, typical styles include:
  - a. Boiling
  - b. Steaming
  - c. Stir-frying
  - d. Grilling
  - e. Slow-cooking
  - f. Roasting
- D. For even cooking try to choose buds similar in size, or cut larger buds into smaller pieces so that they are uniform.
- E. Be careful when preparing as overcooked Brussels sprouts become gray, soft, and release a chemical that makes them bitter and more pungent in flavor.
- F. When seasoning Brussels sprouts work well with both salty and sweet flavor profiles.
  - a. Try adding the following seasonings depending on the cuisine being served or type of flavor you are craving:
    - i. Parmesan Cheese
    - ii. Butter
    - iii. Balsamic Vinegar
    - iv. Brown Sugar
    - v. Chestnuts
    - vi. Pepper
    - vii. Ginger
    - viii. Soy sauce
- G. Unused Brussels sprouts may be kept in the fridge for up to a week, however their taste gets stronger and less sweet over time. They are at their best when prepared three to four days of purchase.

- H. For extended storage many people enjoy pickling Brussels sprouts.
- a. Use the same brine recipe you typically use when making pickles and eat alone or as a garnish with your beverage of choice ;)

**V. Fun Facts about Brussels Sprouts!**

- A. In Europe the largest producers of Brussels sprouts are the Netherlands and Germany. While in America, California and Washington grow the largest crops.
- B. Most Brussels sprouts are green, however a Dutch botanist in the 1940's bred purple varieties named Ruby-Red, or Red Bull.
- C. In Europe Brussels sprouts are a staple of holiday cuisine and the UK supermarket Asada expects to sell 140 million sprouts in the two weeks prior to Christmas.
- D. Overcooking sprouts makes them smell like rotten eggs due to the high levels of sulfur-like chemicals they contain. If cooked correctly, however, they can taste sweet and nutty.
- E. The reason why you love or despise Brussel sprouts may come down to your genes. The TAS2R38 gene controls whether you taste a bitter chemical found in sprouts and other vegetables.
- F. A 2008 study by Heinz revealed that Brussels sprouts are the most-hated vegetable in America
- G. Due to a high content of Vitamin K make sure to talk to your doctor if you are taking anti-coagulant medicines such as warfarin, as the sprouts may counter-act the beneficial effects of your prescription.