NOVEMBER: ROOT VEGETABLES

As you may guess, “Root Vegetables” are plant roots that used as vegetables – yes, we eat the roots of these nutritious plants! Many root vegetables, due to their rich red and orange color, are great sources of vitamins A and C, and carotenoids/antioxidants, but also contain lots of nutritious minerals and fiber.

CHECK OUT THE MANY VARIETIES OF HEALTHY Root Vegetables DESCRIBED BELOW!

Onions- these are used in a variety of dishes and rank sixth among the world's leading vegetable crops. Onions not only provide flavor; they also provide health-promoting phytochemicals as well as nutrients. Onions come in three colors — yellow, red, and white. There are no nutritional differences among these onion types. Look for onions that feel dry and solid all over, with no soft spots or sprouts. Avoid selecting onions with green areas or dark patches.

Carrots- the most popular root vegetable is the carrot. Carrots are a good source of vitamin A that is very important for healthy eyesight, skin, and resisting infections. Carrots also are a great source of beta carotene, a healthy carotenoid, which makes them bright orange in color. These orange plant pigments were first identified in carrots which why they are called carotenoids. Beta carotene may help reduce chronic diseases such as cancer and heart disease.

Radishes- there are five main varieties of radishes; the most popular in the United States are the red and white radish. If the leaves are attached to the radish, they should be crisp and green. Avoid soft or spongy radishes. Be sure to check bagged radishes for mold before purchasing. Most varieties of radishes will keep up to two weeks in the refrigerator.

Beets- the beet root was generally used medicinally and did not become a popular food until French chefs recognized their potential in the 1800's. Choose beets that are firm with deep maroon coloring, unblemished skin, and bright green leaves with no sign of wilting. The taproot should still be attached. Avoid large beets which have a hairy taproot. Smaller beets will be sweeter and tenderer. Avoid beets with scales or spots.

Sweet potatoes- these are a Native American plant, and are among the most nutritious foods in the vegetable kingdom! Packed with vitamins, fiber, and healthy carotenoids/antioxidants, they are grown primarily in the Americas, and should not be confused with the less-nutritious yam usually grown in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, which is much larger and inferior with respect to nutritional quality.
Root Vegetable Tips

- Keep chopped onions in a plastic bag in the refrigerator to quickly toss onto a salad, into a pot of soup or stew, into your scrambled eggs, or into your favorite stir-fry! (save some in the freezer too!)
- Dip baby carrots into reduced-fat ranch dressing or all natural peanut butter for a healthy snack.
- Grate red radishes into whole wheat pasta salads or bean salads for a slightly different taste and texture, with an added boost of healthy veggies.
- Place drained canned sliced beets, and chopped onions on your salad as an easy way to add two root vegetables to your healthy greens – remember try to eat lots of healthy vegetables every day!
- Bake your oil-and-seasonings-coated sweet potato pieces or sweet potato “fries” in the same pan with seasoned, boneless chicken breasts or fish fillets for a really easy meal that just needs a salad to make it perfect!

Root Vegetable Recipes!

**Balsamic Roasted Onions**

Ingredients:
- 4 pounds medium-size red onions
- 1/4 cup olive oil
- 3 tablespoons butter
- 1 1/2 teaspoons sugar
- 3 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley

Preheat oven to 500˚F. Line 2 large baking sheets with foil. Cut onions into wedges. Toss with oil. Arrange onions, cut side down, on baking sheets. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Roast until onions are brown and tender, rotating pans in oven and turning onions once, about 45 minutes. Melt butter and add sugar, stirring until sugar dissolves. Remove from heat and add vinegar. Return to heat and simmer until the mixture thickens, about 2 minutes. Arrange onions on platter and drizzle glaze over. Sprinkle with parsley. (Adapted from Utah State Extension)

**Oven Baked Sweet Potato**

Preheat oven to 400˚ F.
Wash sweet potato. Place potato on cookie sheet, then pierce skin on top a few times with a fork. Cook for about 45 minutes or until tender and you begin to see some “syrup” coming out of the fork holes. Cut open sweet potato and enjoy plain, or add your favorite topping such as:
- Drained, canned, crushed pineapple
- Garlic and rosemary sautéed in light olive oil
- Vanilla low-fat Greek yogurt and sprinkle of cinnamon
- Warm applesauce
- Sprinkle of nutmeg, allspice, cinnamon, or all three!

**Microwave Oven Baked Sweet Potato – A GREAT TIME SAVER!**
Wash, then pierce top of sweet potatoes. Place them on a paper towel. Cook 2 medium potatoes on high for 5-9 minutes, till soft to the touch. For 4 potatoes, cook on high for 10-13 minutes. Cut open sweet potato and enjoy plain, or add your favorite toppings such as those listed above.