

Brussels sprouts: The latest in trendy dining

By Mary Welch-Bezemek, Special to this Newspaper | Posted: Thursday, June 23, 2016
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This week in the fruit and vegetable series we will look at Brussels sprouts. Even though Brussels sprouts are a take-it-or-leave-it kind of food for many, they are one of the most popular vegetables in the United States and Mediterranean Europe. In the last few years, Brussels sprouts have become a trendy vegetable that you frequently see served in restaurants, at special events and something everyone wants on their party menu.

Brussels sprouts are small, leafy green buds that resemble small cabbages in appearance and belong to the same family of vegetables as the cabbage, broccoli and cauliflower. Even though this vegetable is small in volume, Brussels sprouts are exceptionally rich sources of protein, dietary fiber, vitamins and antioxidants. They are one of the low-glycemic index nutritious vegetables that are recommended in weight reduction programs and for people with diabetes.

One hundred grams of Brussels sprouts (approximately six to seven sprouts) provide just 45 calories, 3.4 grams of protein and 3.8 grams of dietary fiber. In fact, Brussels sprouts are a storehouse of several flavonoid anti-oxidants that may offer protection from prostate, colon and endometrial cancers. Brussels sprouts are also an excellent source of vitamin C. One hundred grams provide 85 milligrams or 142 percent of the recommended daily allowance (RDA) of vitamin C.

Together with other antioxidant vitamins such as vitamins A and E, it helps protect the human body from infectious diseases such as the common cold and the flu virus. Likewise, Brussels sprouts contain 25 percent of the RDA per 100 grams of vitamin A, which is required for maintaining healthy mucosa and skin, and is essential for eye health. It is also one of the excellent vegetable sources for vitamin K and provides 147 percent of RDA per 100 grams. Vitamin K assists in the prevention of blood clots and has a potential role in bone formation and bone strengthening.



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In addition, Brussels sprouts are a rich source of minerals like copper, calcium, potassium, iron, manganese and phosphorous. Potassium and phosphorous are an important component of cell and body fluids that help control heart rate and blood pressure by countering the effects of sodium in the body. Brussels sprouts are incredibly nutritious vegetables that offer protection from vitamin A deficiency, bone loss and iron-deficiency anemia.

Brussels sprouts are winter crops that flourish best in cool weather and light frosting conditions. Well-grown plants reach about 90 centimeters in height. The sprouts develop all along the stalk, starting from the base and moving upward, measuring about 1 1/2 inches in diameter. In structure, each sprout head consists of clusters of stiff leaves superimposed in compact layers, giving it a round or globular shape as in cabbages. In order to get uniform sprouts, the tip of the stalk is trimmed as soon as sprouts at the bottom begin to develop. In general, sprouts are harvested when their lower buds reach maturity and achieve about an inch in diameter. Fresh sprouts should feature firm, compact and dark green heads and keep well in the refrigerator for up to two days. Remove any damaged or discolored outer leaves and store fresh unwashed sprouts in a closed container inside the refrigerator.

Before cooking, remove discolored and loose outer leaves and trim the stem end. Wash in clean water and then soak for a few minutes in salt water to remove any dirt particles. Fresh sprouts exhibit delicate flavor, however overcooking results in the release of sulfur gases (pungent smell) in cooked recipes. Therefore, sprouts should be blanched in boiling water for just about five minutes, cooled and then added to the recipes. This method will preserve both their flavor and their nutrients. Sprouts may also be roasted, braised or sautéed. So, if you have not had Brussels sprouts in a while, give this nutritious vegetable a try and you, too, will be trendy!