

Turnips turn up as tasty vegetables



A Question of Taste

By Hilary Keating Callaghan

During the past few months, we have been reading "The Little House on the Prairie" series aloud at home. Included among other vivid details of the life of the pioneers are descriptions of their foods.

Some of the meals were very heavy, hearty "Inn-style" spreads while others — particularly in the winter months — were painfully sparse and monotonous. These winter meals relied heavily on foods with a long storage life, including root vegetables. One passage makes mention of the many ways turnips were prepared — baked, mashed, creamed and sliced raw.

This reference caught my attention because I had made some creamed turnips the day before reading this section. The recipe I had used was from Richard Olney's "Simple French Food."

Such basic foods cut across nationalistic lines. This dish, grated turnips slow-simmered in a white sauce and served over eggs, could as easily have been termed "Simple American Food."

The turnip, though, despite its availability, is not enjoyed as much as it might be in this country. Part of the reason for this might be that we subconsciously associate the turnip, along with many other root vegetables, with hardships of the kind endured by preceding generations.

TURNIPS were something to be eaten when good, fresh vegetables were out of season. With improved transportation methods, we now have a wide selection of fruits and vegetables to choose from all year round. The turnip is no longer "necessary" to fill empty stomachs during the winter. This negative view is unfortunate be-

cause, when properly prepared — as in Richard Olney's presentation — the turnip can be a delicious vegetable.

One word of warning — make careful note of the time involved in Egg and Turnip Gratin. Don't make the same mistake I did and start this 30 minutes before you plan to serve it.

The gratin turnip has to sit, salted for 30 minutes before you can begin. Then there is over an hour of cooking time still to go.

An even simpler way to enjoy turnips is simply paring (the skin tends to be bitter) and sliced raw into tossed salads or eaten out of hand, possibly with a radish. Uncooked, turnips have a crisp texture and a refreshing taste — mild, but with a subtle bite reminiscent of a radish.

Whichever way you prepare turnip, the success of the dish will depend largely on the quality of the vegetables you begin with. Try to avoid over-sized turnips, which are likely to be woody. Since this is frequently all that is available in grocery stores, home gardeners have a definite advantage.

You might keep this in mind if you are planning a vegetable garden for this summer. Turnips are a non-demanding crop and worth planting for both the root and greens with their high vitamin-C content and low calorie count (45 calories per cup).

EGG AND TURNIP GRATIN

- 4 servings
 - 1 lb. turnips, tender, firm, crisp, non-fibrous
 - Salt
 - 1/4 cup butter (for the turnips)
 - 2 tsp. flour 3 cups milk
 - 1 cup stale but not dried-out bread, crumbled
 - 1/4 cup butter (for the crumbs)
 - 1/2 cup mayonnaise
 - 6 hard-boiled eggs
- Peel the turnips thickly, grate coarsely, salt them in for 1/2 hour, squeeze, first in their liquid and then, drained, squeeze thoroughly and repeatedly to rid them of all water. Cook turnips in butter, tossing or stirring reg-

ularly, until tender — about 15 minutes.

Sprinkle over the flour and continue to cook, stirring, for another 3 or 4 minutes, then add the milk slowly, stirring all the time. Bring to a boil and regulate the heat to a simmer, stirring occasionally over a period of 1/2 hour.

At the same time, cook the bread-crumbs gently in 1/4 cup butter, tossing or stirring regularly, until lightly colored — 15 to 20 minutes.

Taste the turnip sauce for salt, and pepper, and spoon over halved hard-boiled eggs arranged in a lightly buttered gratin dish. Sprinkle over the crumbs and bake in a hot oven until the sauce is bubbling and the surface colored — 15 to 20 minutes.

- #### TURNIPS RAW
- Serves 6-8
 - 2 lbs. turnips, peeled
 - 2 tsp. toasted sesame seeds
 - 4 scallions, white part only
 - 1/2 cup mayonnaise
 - 1/2 cup plain low-fat yogurt
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste. Mince parsley for garnish.

Coarsely grate turnips into a large salad bowl. To toast sesame seeds, preheat oven to 350 degrees. Spread seeds in pie pan and brown in oven. Let cool.

Mince scallions. Combine with mayonnaise, yogurt, salt and pepper. If you aren't going to use the dressing immediately, wait and add the sesame seeds just before you mix the dressing with the turnips. Serve sprinkled with parsley.

(adapted from "The Low-Cholesterol Food Processor Cookbook" by Suzanne S. Jones)

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A fish for all seasons

By Ella Graham editor

There's a new sardine on the market that is replacing tuna in sandwiches and salads. The Pacific Pear chunk style sardine is worthy of a try because it is much less expensive than tuna.

A trial survey in this office brought some interesting results. One young woman, who "hates" sardines, ate several sandwiches because she was convinced it was tuna. An editor just sat down and ate the whole can — but he likes tuna and sardines. He did say they were very light and did not have as "fishy" a flavor as regular sardines.

For those who may wish to make their own test, here are some recipes:

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