

FARMER IN THE FIELD



BRUSSEL SPROUTS, A WINTER FAVORITE

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As the days get shorter and the temperatures drop many farmers are tilling their fields and getting ready for winter. Most fields will not be replanted until spring leaving us with much less fresh local produce to choose from. With many of our summer favorites disappearing from the farmers markets it is time to look toward the heartier winter vegetables to sustain us through the upcoming chilly months. Brussel sprouts are one of those vegetables and most are grown in California. You can drive through the Castroville area and see field after field of this tasty vegetable growing. Brussel sprouts grow in bunches of 20 to 40 on the stem of a plant that grows from two to three feet tall. Although they are available year round, their peak-growing season is autumn through early spring, making November the perfect month to showcase the brussel sprout.

When I was growing up, I liked brussel sprouts but remember them being somewhat bitter. That's not the case anymore with the new hybrid varieties yielding a milder almost sweet tasting sprout. And the health benefits are enormous. Brussels sprouts look like miniature heads of cabbage and contain significant amounts of the antioxidants vitamin C and beta-carotene (vitamin A) making them the perfect winter treat.

Tips for Preparing Brussels sprouts:

Before washing Brussels sprouts, remove stems and any yellow or discolored leaves. Wash them well under running water or soak them in a bowl of water to remove any insects that may reside in the inner leaves.

Brussels sprouts are usually cooked whole. To allow the heat to permeate throughout all of the leaves and better ensure an even texture, cut an "X" in the bottom of the stem before cooking.

While Brussels sprouts are usually served as a side dish, they also make a nice addition to cold salads.

A Few Quick Serving Ideas:

Braise Brussels sprouts in liquid infused with your favorite herbs and spices.

Since cooked Brussels sprouts are small and compact, they make a great snack food that can be simply eaten as is or seasoned with salt and pepper to taste.

Combine quartered cooked Brussels sprouts with sliced red onions, walnuts and your favorite mild tasting cheese such as a goat cheese or feta. Toss with olive oil and balsamic vinegar for an exceptionally healthy, delicious side dish.