

**Healthy Bytes Initiative Article**

**Oct 2022 Rutabaga**

A picture containing food, vegetable

Description automatically generated**Health Benefits of Rutabaga**

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Rutabaga is a sweet, root vegetable that is part of the cruciferous (cabbage) family. Its flavor is a cross between a turnip and a cabbage. Like other cruciferous vegetables, rutabagas contain compounds that fight cancer. They are low calorie and highly nutritious. They contain multiple forms of antioxidants as well as vitamins, minerals and fiber that help prevent inflammation and chronic diseases.

Rutabagas contains several vitamins including antioxidant vitamins C and E which protect against free radicals, oxidative stress, aging and disease. B6 is essential for many reactions in the body especially protein metabolism, production of neurotransmitters and helping maintain normal levels of homocysteine in the blood. Lutein and beta-carotene help protect our eyes. Minerals in rutabagas include potassium for fluid balance and blood pressure control. Magnesium is required for energy production, helps maintain a regular heart rhythm, control blood glucose and blood pressure. Rutabagas also contain calcium for pH balance and strong bones and small amounts of iron and zinc.

Another important antioxidant family is the glucosinolates. These compounds may help to prevent the development of cancer. Rutabagas have also been found to contain tryptophan, melatonin and serotonin, neurotransmitters that support sleep, mood and hunger regulation.

As a winter root vegetable, rutabagas can be found in most grocery stores, especially in the fall and winter months. Seek out smooth, firm roots that feel heavy. Rutabagas can be consumed raw or cooked, and both the root and the greens are edible. Store in the refrigerator or at a cool temperature (garage or basement) until ready for use. To prepare, wash and peel roots. These can be cooked in a variety of ways depending on the flavor profile of your dish. Try substituting rutabaga where you would usually use potatoes. One advantage would be that rutabagas have a lower carbohydrate load and more fiber than potatoes, making them a good choice for those with diabetes.

Some great ideas for using rutabagas include cubing for use in soups, stews, or casseroles. Roast with a small amount of oil, chopped onion and spices to bring out the robust flavor. Boil or steam and mash as a substitute for potatoes, or mix rutabaga, which is slightly orange, with potatoes and other root vegetables like carrots, sweet potato and parsnips for a colorful, flavorful side dish. Use raw rutabaga sliced thinly on sandwiches, cubed or grated in salads, or cut into sticks with dips or hummus. Or use raw, grated rutabaga for coleslaw, by itself, or mixed with red and green cabbage. You could also cut rutabagas into fries and crisp up by baking or air frying.

As fall approaches, consider adding rutabagas to your meal planning. They are not only healthy and delicious, but they are inexpensive and can help make your soups, stews, casseroles and side dishes feed a large family or gathering. Plus the added cancer-fighting compounds make rutabagas a great substitute for potatoes. Add this versatile vegetable to your harvest table for a hearty, healthy variation.