Brussels Sprouts – Who Knew They Were So Good!

By Janet Hackert, Regional Nutrition and Health Education Specialist

The cool weather in northwest Missouri has been good for growing cruciferous vegetables like Brussels sprouts. These little green vegetables are sometimes referred to by children as “cannon balls,” and often are not a big favorite from the vegetable group. But selected well, eaten soon after picking and cooked properly, they can be a nutritious treat.

Like many vegetables, Brussels sprouts themselves are low in fat, low calorie and very low in sodium while being a good source of dietary fiber, high in Vitamin C, providing Vitamin K, and a good source of folate.

Brussels sprout grow in an interesting manner. Best harvested when they are about an inch in diameter, the sprouts, or small cabbage-shaped heads, grow in clusters up a central, woody stalk. They are best harvested from the bottom up, as the heads form and grow. Choose tight bright green heads, free of yellowing leaves. When the sprouts get too big, they can get bitter like their cruciferous “cousins” such as broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, horseradish or kale.

Ideally fresh Brussels sprouts can be held in cold, moist storage, that is, 32 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit and 90 to 95 percent relative humidity, in a perforated plastic bag for up to three weeks. If there are more than can be used in that amount of time, they do freeze well. To freeze, “select green, firm and compact heads. Trim, removing coarse outer leaves. Wash thoroughly and immerse in brine (4 teaspoons salt to 1 gallon of water for 30 minutes) to remove insects. Sort into small, medium and large sizes. Water blanch small heads 3 minutes, medium heads 4 minutes, and large heads 5 minutes. Cool promptly, drain, package, seal and freeze.” (from MU Extension Publication GH1503, Quality for Keeps: Freezing Vegetables). They can also be pickled; a safe recipe and procedure for this can be found at the National Center for Home Food Preservation web site, http://homefoodpreservation.org.

Brussels sprouts can be enjoyed in a variety of ways. The Fruits and Veggies More Matters web site suggests trying them roasted at 400 degrees Fahrenheit for 40 minutes; using them in a vegetable kebob; blanched, sautéed with garlic and onion and tossed with vinegar and parmesan cheese; chopped in a potpie recipe; stir fried; broiled with a mustard glaze; or several other ways. Just keep in mind that if you do not care for them one way, you may find them delicious another way.

For more information on growing, selecting, harvesting, storing or serving Brussels sprouts, or any other topic, please contact me, Janet Hackert, at 660-425-6434 or HackertJ@missouri.edu or your local University of Missouri Extension office.

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