We rhapsodize over garden-fresh corn and sweet peas, but when was the last time you waxed poetic over rutabagas? Yes, winter has its treasures too—they’re just hidden underground. This is the realm of root vegetables, plants that are unbelievably sweet.

So why do we scorn them? Why is it that summer vegetables get all the glory? For one thing, roots are often less than beautiful to behold—knobby or gnarled or hairy. Then, too, they don’t seem as sexy as, say, asparagus, making its long-awaited appearance each spring. Roots are the old reliables, the staple foods that last through the winter. But once we find we have other options, we turn our backs on the plebian roots—and not just the metaphorical ones.

Root vegetables’ bad rep has also arisen from the harsh treatment they often undergo, being boiled to a mush. But given tender care, their rough edges are transformed. And in the dark days of winter, roots seem to gleam on your plate, as if the rutabaga’s golden flesh or the carrot’s deep orange glow has captured the lost warmth of the sun.
Of all the root vegetables, the ones I crave most in winter are carrots, rutabagas, celery root, parsnips, turnips—and especially beets. Originally cultivated for their leafy tops, beets were an important source of vitamins for the ancient Greeks. Most are not even grown for consumption as a vegetable but for the sugar they yield. First developed in the 19th century, sugar beets are now the source of most of the world’s sugar. But these white beets quite literally pale next to the familiar red beets, which offer up rich, earthy flavor. Beets marry well with myriad ingredients, from zesty citrus to coriander and caraway seed.

The ancient Greeks appreciated carrots more for their reputed aphrodisiac properties than for their taste. This reputation followed carrots to Rome, where the cruel emperor Caligula is said to have force-fed his senators carrots to make them more manly. Like the Greeks and Romans before them, early Europeans savored carrots for other qualities in addition to flavor, using them in medicine. They are rich in beta-carotene and vitamin C, and they were fashionable—the lacy leaves ornamented clothing and hair.

Celery root, or celeriac, is one of the oldest recorded vegetables, a type of celery bred for its bulbous root rather than for its stalk. Celeriac is not widely eaten in the United States, no doubt due to its less-than-attractive form. The large, heavy root often arrives in stores covered in coarse fibers and speckled with the dirt embedded in its many grooves. But scrape off the peel, and a creamy white interior is revealed, which has the subtle, yet distinctive, flavor of parsley and celery. Celeriac adds wonderful flavor to soups, and it is divine when puréed and mixed with other root vegetables.

The parsnip, native to Europe and western Asia, may seem like another hard sell. The parsnip is so sweet that it was given to medieval babies as a pacifier. But the innocuous-looking plant has also caused discord. Some people believed that parsnips turned poisonous if left to winter in the ground, while others contended that the root could safely be eaten only after it had been touched by frost. (The latter camp rightly noticed that frost concentrates the sugar in the root.) Perhaps this disagreement accounts for the general lack of enthusiasm for the unassuming parsnip.

And in the dark days of winter, roots seem to gleam on your plate.

Rutabagas resulted from a cross between cabbage and the Swedish turnip. Roasting brings out the inherent sweetness, caramelizing the abundant sugars within. Perhaps all that sugar calls forth hidden passions. In The Four Seasons of the House of Cerruti, a 14th-century Italian description of a noble household, the anonymous author advises that rutabagas, “if eaten with herbs and abundant pepper... arouse young men to heights of sexual adventurousness.”

Like most roots, turnips have been grown since ancient times. The Romans, in particular, relished their taste. Italian historian Platina held turnips in high regard. In his volume On Right Pleasure and Good Health, he wrote: “Taken in food, they soothe the throat and chest, inflate the belly and stir passion.”

So if we heed the words of medieval writers—and perhaps our own hearts—it seems that root vegetables are sexy after all.

Gingered Carrot Soup

SERVES 6

This soup takes on the character of the broth used for its base. Give it onion tones, or make it sweet with other root vegetables. The more richly flavored the broth, the heartier the soup will be.

3 Tbs. butter
1 medium-sized onion, sliced
1 garlic clove, halved
1 Tbs. minced fresh ginger
1 lb. carrots, peeled and sliced
3 cups vegetable broth
1 cup orange juice
2 Tbs. raw white rice
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

1. In large saucepan, heat butter over medium heat. Sauté onion and garlic until soft but not brown, 5 to 8 minutes. Add ginger and carrots, and sauté 5 minutes longer.
2. Stir in broth, orange juice and rice, reduce heat to low, cover and cook for 30 minutes. Allow to cool, then purée in batches in food processor or blender. Add salt and pepper to taste. Reheat soup before serving.

PER SERVING: 140 CAL; 2G PROT; 6G TOTAL FAT (3G SAT; FAT); 20G CARB; 15MG CHOL; 340MG SOD; 3G FIBER; 11G SUGARS

Celery Root and Potato Purée

SERVES 6

Here are sophisticated mashed potatoes with a hint of celery flavor and a wonderfully creamy texture. The purée is ethereal on its own, but it also makes a perfect companion for vegetable stews.

10 cups water
1 Tbs. plus ¼ tsp. salt
¼ lb. celery root, peeled and cubed
1½ lbs. boiling potatoes, peeled and cubed
2 garlic cloves
2 Tbs. unsalted butter
Freshly ground white pepper to taste
1. In large saucepan, bring 10 cups water to a boil with 1 tablespoon salt over medium heat. Add celery root, and cook for 15 minutes. Add potatoes and garlic cloves. Continue to cook for 15 minutes longer, or until celery root and potatoes are tender.

2. Drain vegetables in colander, reserving about ⅛ cup cooking liquid. Transfer vegetables to bowl, and mash with butter; ⅛ teaspoon salt and pepper to taste. Add 2 to 3 tablespoons of reserved water to make mixture creamy. Serve immediately.

PER SERVING: 160 CAL; 3G PROT; 4G TOTAL FAT (2G SAT. FAT); 30G CARB; 10MG CHOL; 1320MG SOD; 3G FIBER; 3G SUGARS

**Wine Suggestions**
If the purée is standing on its own, there are many wine varieties that will pair with this yummy, mouth-watering, earthy dish: sparkling wines from Spain or Italy, white varieties such as Riesling, Chardonnay and Semillon or red varieties such as Pinot Noir and Syrah/Shiraz. Base your wine choice on other dishes being served. Experiment!

### Curried Turnips

**SERVES 6**

Once you've tried these spicy turnips, you'll be hooked. Slow-simmering infuses them with the curried yogurt sauce, resulting in a zesty and colorful dish. Adjust the flavor by using less cayenne or adding more yogurt. Serve with basmati rice and a green vegetable, with chutney on the side. The Indian seasoning garam masala is an assertive blend of such spices as cinnamon, black peppercorns, cumin seeds, cloves, coriander and nutmeg. It's best freshly made from dry-roasted spices, but commercial blends are available in markets.

2 Tbs. butter
1 medium-sized onion, thinly sliced
⅛ tsp. turmeric
1 Tbs. minced fresh ginger
⅛ tsp. ground coriander
⅛ tsp. cayenne
⅛ tsp. salt
½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
⅛ tsp. garam masala

½ cup plain yogurt
2 lbs. turnips, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes

1. In large skillet, heat butter over medium heat. When hot, sauté onion until golden, 5 to 8 minutes. Stir in turmeric, ginger, coriander, cayenne, salt, pepper and garam masala, and cook, stirring, for 1 minute. Add yogurt and cook 1 minute more.

2. Stir in turnips, turning to coat evenly with yogurt mixture. Cover skillet, reduce heat to medium-low, and cook turnips until tender; about 30 minutes. Add 1 tablespoon water, if necessary, to keep them moist.

PER SERVING: 90 CAL; 3G PROT; 4G TOTAL FAT (2G SAT. FAT); 11G CARB; 10MG CHOL; 420MG SOD; 4G FIBER; 6G SUGARS

**Wine Suggestions**
Because everyone's idea of curry is different, pairing curries with wine presents the food lover with an opportunity to thoroughly examine what's in a dish in order to come up with a good wine match. Is the dish aromatic-spicy or hot-spicy or both? Is the seasoning herbal? Does the dish contain dairy? Choose a wine whose characteristics mimic those same characteristics in the dish.

### Maple-Glazed Parsnips

**SERVES 6**

This recipe is for everyone with a sweet tooth. The sugar in the parsnips comes to the fore when paired with maple syrup, which cooks down to a beautiful nut-brown glaze.

½ cup real maple syrup
½ cup apple cider
2 Tbs. butter
⅛ tsp. salt
2 lbs. parsnips, peeled and cut into 3x½-inch sticks

1. Preheat oven to 350F.
2. In small saucepan, bring maple syrup, cider, butter and salt to a boil over medium heat. Reduce heat to medium-low, and cook for 5 minutes.
3. Spread parsnips in shallow 9x13-inch ovenproof dish, and pour syrup mixture...
Crust

1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
1/2 tsp. salt
1/4 cup shortening
4 to 5 Tbs. ice water

Filling

1 1/2 lbs. rutabaga, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch cubes
1/2 cup firmly packed light brown sugar
1/4 cup dark corn syrup
1 tsp. pure vanilla extract
1 tsp. ground cinnamon
1/4 tsp. ground ginger
1/4 tsp. salt
3 large eggs, lightly beaten
1 cup heavy cream

1. To make crust, in medium bowl, mix flour and salt. Cut in shortening until mixture resembles coarse meal. Stir in just enough ice water to hold dough together; do not overmix. Roll out dough on floured surface, and fit into 9-inch ovenproof glass or other pie plate.

2. To make filling, in large saucepan, bring generous amount of water to boil over medium heat. Add cubed rutabaga, and cook until very tender, 30 to 45 minutes. Drain well.

3. Transfer to food processor, food mill or blender, and process until smooth. If using blender, moisten mixture with 1/2 cup cream to process. Measure and pack cups rutabaga purée, and place in large bowl.

4. Preheat oven to 400F.

5. Stir sugar, corn syrup and spices into rutabaga purée, mixing well. Fold in eggs, then stir in heavy cream until well blended. Pour mixture in pie crust.

6. Bake for 45 minutes, or until set. Cool before serving.

PER SERVING: 350 CAL; 5G PROT; 20G TOTAL FAT (8G SAT FAT); 36G CARB; 93MG CHOL; 230MG SOD; 2G FIBER; 18G SUGARS

Wine Suggestions

This pie blends the best of two dessert worlds—tangy fruit and cream—so you should choose a dessert wine that is either tangy or creamy or both. Try Bonny Doon Vineyard Vin de Glacière Muscat Canelli.