

The New York Times

A GOOD APPETITE

The Best Vegetable You've Never Tried

By [MELISSA CLARK](#)

Published: January 4, 2010

FOR weeks, Bill Maxwell of Maxwell Farms in Changewater, N.J., put the rutabaga bug in my ear every Saturday morning at the farmers' market.

At the beginning, his urgings were gentle.

"The rutabaga is looking particularly fine this week," he said as the vegetable came into season in October.

Throughout the fall, he persisted: "Rutabaga is the most underrated vegetable. You should try it for Thanksgiving."

But I kept demurring despite his coaxing.

Finally, he insisted, pressing a fat, taut root vegetable into my hands. "Just take it and try it," he said. "I'll bet you anything you'll be back for more."

Thus began my new obsession with rutabaga.

Though I'd had it before, it wasn't often. Puréed rutabaga is hardly a restaurant staple.

And the one time I made it myself (over a decade ago), the root I got was so tough and dry I could barely slice through it with an ordinary knife, resorting to the meat cleaver. The flavor was wan, not worth the effort.

But this rutabaga was moist and fresh and easy to cube. Mr. Maxwell advised boiling, then mashing it with caramelized onions. But because the oven was on anyway for chicken, I decided to try roasting.

I tossed the rutabaga cubes with oil, salt and a little maple syrup, cooking them until the flesh was tender and translucent, the edges golden. It was as sweet and rich as butternut squash with a slightly peppery turnip note.

The New York Times

It was so good, in fact, that I couldn't stop eating the cubes straight from the pan before the chicken was done.

Since then, I've bought rutabaga (also known as Swedes or yellow turnips) every week and prepared them as boiled, sautéed or braised.

Roasting, which caramelizes the sugars of the vegetable and brings out its sweetness, remains my favorite.

Although roasted rutabaga needs no adornment, I recently was in the mood for something heftier, so I decided to make a rutabaga salad.

My idea was to riff on a crunchy and colorful farro and roasted vegetable salad I'd had at the Al Di La restaurant in Brooklyn a few years ago.

Farro, a variety of wheat, makes particularly crunchy grain salads that stay plump and firm even after sitting for hours. I knew the leftovers would hold up well for days.

Instead of roasted winter squash, I tossed in rutabaga, and substituted the ricotta salata in my refrigerator for the goat cheese that Anna Klinger uses at the restaurant.

But I made sure to keep Ms. Klinger's hazelnuts for added texture and their warm, toasted flavor.

The salad is yet another way to use my new favorite vegetable. Mr. Maxwell won that bet hands down.