

Los Angeles Times FOOD

Brussels sprouts: How to choose, store and prepare



(David Karp / For the Times)

Yeah, yeah, I know -- Brussels sprouts? Some vegetables are magnets for abuse, and the Brussels sprout is certainly one of the kings of that. But given proper respect, it is one of the finest of the cool-weather vegetables. Cooked properly, Brussels sprouts have all the delicate sweetness of great cabbage, but with a more complex vegetable flavor as well. If you really want to stun people, use them as a centerpiece--they come dozens to a single thick stalk, looking like a vegetable from Mars.

How to choose: Choose Brussels sprouts that are vivid green and are tightly closed. As they sit, the leaves will begin to separate and the edges will yellow. Squeeze the head, it should be hard enough that there is very little give.

How to store: Brussels sprouts should be refrigerated in a tightly sealed bag.

How to prepare: To get the best out of Brussels sprouts, treat them gently. Start with selection -- the smallest sprouts seem to be the sweetest. Then trim them carefully, removing any outer leaves that look pale or yellow, paring the hard base and cutting an "X" in the bottom to allow the heat to penetrate the tightly bunched leaves. Finally, and most important, cook them briefly -- they should be tender but still have a trace of crispness at the center. Undercook them and the flavor is bland and grassy; overcook them and it's sulfurous. But when you hit that sweet spot (five to seven minutes in a steamer), the colors are vivid and the flavor is complex.