

# Root Seller

A chef's surreptitious meeting with a starchy tuber.



Fresh and more tender than their grown-up counterparts, baby fingerling potatoes roasted with garlic in diet-busting bacon fat deliver a flavorful side dish.

**T**IM BANDO, head chef at Theory, pats his stomach proudly and brags about the 15 pounds he's dropped since he began his low-carb diet.

I feel bad. I'm here to talk with Bando about starchy, diet-crushing root vegetables. But he waxes poetic the moment the subject comes up. He speaks about rutabagas, turnips and fingerling potatoes as if they're long-lost college friends. Within a few minutes, he's writing down recipes he thought he'd forgotten, enthusiastic to "test them" to make sure he's "remembering correctly."

"I like the variation of flavors that you can get from root vegetables," explains Bando. "You can bring out the sweetness by roasting them in the oven, and play the textures off each other.

"Root vegetables aren't as 'wintry' as people think," he adds. "They do survive the

winter well, but this time of year the first carrots and new potatoes are just coming in. They're the hardiest vegetables that sprout up — the first sign of spring, so using 'new' carrots and potatoes in these recipes really gives a fresh taste to the dishes."

I hope I haven't done him in on the diet as he retreats to the kitchen to try out the recipes. The ratatouille sounded innocent enough, but like a kid who tastes his first chocolate on Easter Sunday, once he gets started there's no stopping him. Soon, he's plowing into descriptions that sound lethal. I have to talk him out of using duck fat in his fingerling potato recipe. He opts instead for bacon fat.

Ah well, I think, as I slink out of the Tremont eatery. At least Bando has a good excuse to cheat on his diet. ■

*Miriam Carey's favorite childhood toy was a Mr. Potato Head. Now she cooks him. She may be reached through [magmail@plwind.com](mailto:magmail@plwind.com).*

## Fingerling Potatoes Roasted With Bacon

- 1 lb. bacon, cut into thin strips
- 2 lbs. fingerling potatoes, each cut diagonally into 2 pieces
- 3 shallots, sliced thin
- 8 lrg. cloves garlic, whole
- Salt, freshly ground pepper to taste
- 1 sprig fresh thyme, chopped, or 1 tsp. dried
- 1 cup beef stock or low-sodium beef broth

1. Cook bacon slowly until crisp. Drain on paper towels; set aside.

2. Toss potatoes, shallots and garlic in bacon fat. Season with salt, pepper and thyme. Arrange mixture in 9-by-13-inch baking pan. Add beef broth, cover and bake at 350 degrees for 45 minutes, or until potatoes are fork-tender. Remove from oven, garnish with crumbled bacon and serve with meat or fish.

**Yield:** 4 servings.

### Missing a recipe?

You can find *Buck Burner* recipes at [www.cleveland.com/sundaymag](http://www.cleveland.com/sundaymag). Click on "Sunday Magazine" and "60-Day Sunday Magazine Archive."

## Root Vegetable Ratatouille

- 1 lrg. or 2 med. turnips, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch cubes (about 1 cup)
- 2 med. rutabagas, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch cubes (about 1 cup)
- 2 med. carrots, peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks (about 1 cup)
- 1 med. celery root, peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks (about 1 cup)
- Salt, freshly ground pepper to taste
- 1 med. red onion, diced
- 2 lrg. cloves garlic, minced
- 1 med. spaghetti squash
- 2 sprigs fresh sage, chopped, or about 1 Tbsp. dried (divided use)
- 6 Tbsps. extra-virgin olive oil

1. Heat oven to 350 degrees. Place two strips of aluminum foil on each of two baking sheets.

2. In large mixing bowl, toss diced turnip with 1 tablespoon olive oil. Salt and pepper to taste. Place turnip on one strip of aluminum foil. Repeat procedure for rutabagas, carrots and celery root.

3. Roast vegetables for a half-hour. Each vegetable will require a slightly different cooking time, so observe soft-tenderness of each and remove as they finish. When all are done, combine in one-quart casserole dish and set aside.

4. While vegetables are roasting, heat remaining 2 tablespoons olive oil in medium pan. Sauté onion and garlic until soft. Set aside.

5. Split spaghetti squash in half; roast cut side down with just enough water to cover the bottom of baking tray. Roast until soft (about 25 minutes), and then remove from oven and let cool. When cool enough to touch, scoop spaghetti squash out of its shell and mix squash with root vegetables. Add onion-and-garlic mixture and sage. Mix well.

6. Return casserole, covered, to the oven for about 20 minutes. Serve as a side dish, or as a vegetarian main course.

**Yield:** 4 servings.



Starches and vegetables mingle in this ratatouille — a great one-dish side.

## Explore Your Roots

**O**ddly shaped and curiously colored, root vegetables sometimes are passed over because of their looks. But it's taste that counts.

Here's how to choose the right roots for these recipes.

**Turnip:** White with a pale purple tinge at the top, the turnip is best when young and new. Choose one that is small in size but feels heavy. If the roots are attached, they should be firm. If the leaves are on, they should be fresh and green.

**Rutabaga:** Same as for the turnip.

**Celery Root:** Knobby and brown, celery root has a pungent flavor that is somewhere between an herb (such as parsley) and celery. Pick one that is the size of a large apple, is firm to the touch

and has a relatively smooth surface without too many roots.

**Fingerling Potatoes:** Fingerlings are the baby version of long white potatoes. Their skins should be new with a brown or even pale-gray tinge and few — if any — eyes. Choose fingerlings that are no bigger than a thumb and look for clean, well-shaped potatoes with healthy-looking skins.

**Spaghetti Squash:** This squash is named not because it looks like spaghetti but because it *cooks* like spaghetti. When heated, the creamy-yellow squash separates into golden yellow strands. Look for a hard, smooth exterior with a pale yellow tinge and no green spots.

— M.C.