

Autumn Veggies With Asian Roots by Carol Harvie Yamaguchi

Root vegetables such as daikon, burdock, lotus root, ginger and sweet potato are highly respected in Asian cooking not just for their culinary value, but also for their nutritional and medicinal benefits.

Ginger is perhaps the best known of the Asian roots, revered for its digestive and anti-inflammatory benefits. With its peppery, pungent taste and its warming effects, ginger is wonderful in stir fries, hot pot, soups, and desserts. It is also used as a palate cleanser with sushi, and as a flavouring for teas and beer.

Daikon, traditionally a cold weather vegetable, is available all year round at the supermarket. Used raw, pickled, or cooked, this long white radish is eaten on a daily basis in one form or another throughout Asia. In Korea, daikon kimchee is a spicy condiment pickled in garlic and hot chili pepper that accompanies every meal and is said to contain immunity boosting qualities. In Japanese cuisine, grated and seasoned daikon is served as a garnish with grilled chicken, fried beef, deep fried tofu, tempura or sashimi. A traditional Indonesian salad dish uses julienned pieces of raw daikon and assorted vegetables, and mixes them with peanuts and chili dressing. Cooked daikon is milder and delicate in flavour and can be used in a variety of Asian stir fries, stews, and soups. The enzymes in daikon aid digestion; so it is extremely beneficial to one's health.

Lotus root is related to the water lily. With its crunchy texture and beautiful natural pattern, it adds visual appeal and can be used in both sweet and savoury dishes.

Burdock is another widely used Asian root vegetable; its humble appearance hides an excellent food source. With its long thin woody root and brown bark-like skin, it is crunchy and filled with fibre and nutrition. Burdock can be prepared in a variety of ways including soups, curries, stir fries, salads, stews, and marinades.

Sweet Potato is another versatile root found in many Asian cuisines. Numerous Asian dessert recipes including puddings, jellies, croquettes, puffs and pies are made with this naturally sweet vegetable. Delicate Puffs made from mashed sweet potato and chestnut are a popular and typical Japanese dessert made in the autumn. Children in Korea love eating baked sweet potato as an after school snack. With its high vitamin A content, this root is extremely nutritious as well as delicious.

Chicken & Daikon Stew serves 4 with rice

1 lb. skinned and boned chicken thighs
8 oz. peeled daikon
1 ¾ cups water
1 ½ tbsp. soy sauce
1 ½ tsp. sugar
1 tbsp. mirin (opt.) a sweet Japanese rice wine available at Asian groceries

3 tbsp. red wine
pinch of salt

Method:

Cut chicken and daikon into 1 ½ inch irregularly shaped pieces.
Boil water over med. heat - add chicken and daikon.
Boil gently 10 minutes.
Add soy sauce, sugar, mirin, and salt
Boil gently until chicken is tender - about 10 minutes more
Add wine and simmer for 2 minutes

Note: you can add potatoes or carrots to the stew if desired -
the sauce ingredients can be doubled to accommodate added veggies.
This is a very mild dish, but nice and warming in the cold weather.

Carol Harvie Yamaguchi is fascinated with food and its history. She currently writes for B.C. Restaurant News where her column specializes in multicultural cuisine.
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