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2001

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Dennis Hinkamp
Utah State University

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Recommended Citation
Hinkamp, Dennis, "Plant Some New Vegetables This Year" (2001). *All Archived Publications.* Paper 892.
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GARDEN NOTES

PLANT SOME NEW VEGETABLES THIS YEAR

By Dennis Hinkamp

April 2001 Spring-38

What is a vegetable? -- anything kids won't eat.

Most vegetables are familiar to home gardeners, says Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University horticulturist. A few, however, pride themselves on remaining anonymous, but may be well worth trying this season.

Kohlrabi, a member of the cabbage family, is one of the funniest looking plants found in the vegetable garden, he says. It looks like a flying saucer with thick, spiked hair. The plant forms an edible bulb with leaves attached above the ground. It tastes a lot like a mild radish and is delicious eaten raw or cooked. The green varieties are a bit milder flavored than the purple ones.

"One advantage of raising kohlrabi is it has few, if any, pests," Goodspeed says. "I have never seen any worms attack it or heard anyone complain that it died from insect damage or a disease. It does best during the cool part of the growing season, and produces an edible bulb in about 45 to 60 days so it is possible to get three crops a season from the same garden space."

Leeks are another cool season vegetable that grows well in our climate, he says. This relative of the onion can be seeded directly into the garden about the middle of March. Leeks prefer a light, organic soil and plenty of fertilizer. Leeks are a great vegetable for those who love the taste of onions, but not the after effects of eating them. The mild flavor makes fantastic soups, stews and other dishes.

"Celeriac is a vegetable which produces a swollen root that looks like a science experiment gone bad," Goodspeed says. "It is related to celery and has a similar flavor. It is generally used in soups or stews as a flavor enhancer or eaten fresh. Celeriac is frost sensitive, so it normally is started indoors, then planted in the garden about mid-May."

Another vegetable that has a celery flavor is celtuce, he adds. The name is derived from its genetic relationship to lettuce, and its celery-like appearance and taste. The leaves are small and well suited for making salads or can be used for cooking. The edible stalk, which develops on the plant over time, can be peeled and the heart eaten or used like celery.

Chicory is popular garden vegetable in Europe, but is seldom seen in U.S. gardens, Goodspeed says. Its leaves can be harvested and eaten like lettuce. As a cool season crop, the

seeds can be planted directly in the garden in late March, as soon as the soil can be worked. It can also be planted in late summer for a nice fall harvest.

Another plant grown for its foliage is mustard greens, he says. They are popular in the South, but can also be grown in northern Utah. Sow the seeds directly in the garden in early to mid-April. These plants can withstand a mild frost, but not a heavy freeze. Once they start to grow, thin them to 12 inches between plants. Some varieties are ready for harvest as early as mid-May.

Be brave and try some new vegetable this year, he suggests. They could add some variety to your menu and you might even find that you like them.

For more information, contact your local USU County Extension office.

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Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 9 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Robert L. Gilliland, Vice-President and Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Utah State University, Logan, Utah. (EP/04/2001/DF)