

Rutabaga—*Brassica napus* L. (Napobrassica group)¹

James M. Stephens²

Rutabagas are also referred to as swedes, Swedish turnips, and turnip-rooted cabbage. It, like the turnip, is a member of the Cruciferae or cabbage family. Thus, rutabaga is related to turnip, cabbage, and cauliflower.

Description

Rutabaga resembles turnip in producing a large edible storage root. They differ chiefly in leaf characteristics and in minor details of root shape and structure. While turnip leaves are usually light green, thin, and hairy, those of rutabaga are bluish green and smooth like cabbage.

Turnip roots generally have little or no neck and a distinct taproot, while rutabagas often are slightly more elongated and have a thick leafy neck with prominent secondary roots as well as the taproot. Flesh of rutabaga roots has a yellowish tone compared with the bright white of turnip roots.

Culture

Rutabaga is a cool season vegetable, which means that it may be grown best in the winter in Florida. Rutabaga will withstand frosts and mildly freezing temperatures. For the most part, it is found primarily in home gardens in this state.

They require a longer growing season (about 90 days) than do turnips. Culture is similar to that for beets. They are grown from seeds spaced 3-4 inches apart in 30-inch rows. The main varieties are 'American Purple Top,' 'Macomber,' 'Purple Top Yellow,' 'Long Island Improved,' 'Sweet Russian,' 'Laurential,' and 'Zwaan's Neckless Purple Top.'



Figure 1. Rutabaga.

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Harvesting and Use

Rutabaga can be baked, diced, mashed, creamed, glazed, fried, added to casseroles, stews, or soups, or served raw in salads. While leaves are also edible, they are not highly regarded as a cooking green.

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