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Rutabaga is a plant grown for its fleshy root. Although they are quite similar to turnips, they are distinctive species. Brassica Rapa is the turnip, while rutabaga are Brassica Campestris or Brassica Napus.

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Turnips are flat and the leaves are green and hairy. Rutabagas are elongated, yellow, and have roots coming out from the lower parts. The leaves of rutabagas have the bluish-tint of kale or kohlrabi, which unfortunately they can be confused with.

The rutabaga requires a bit more time to mature than a turnip. We broadcast seed about the same time, mid-August and harvest them after Thanksgiving. The variety we grow is Laurentian.

An old farming book lists 11 varieties of rutabaga, but I guess some of those have disappeared. In the old days, people needed food to store during winter, and rutabagas were a staple food. The roots last well into spring in a common root cellar.

I have made the same mistake now for two years. I planted the rutabagas next to the kale and sent my students out to harvest kale. The leaves look so similar that rutabaga leaves got picked, too. They do not taste as good as kale.

Swedes are the European name for rutabagas. They have been cultivated for so long their origin is uncertain. As an easy to grow fall crop, they are traditionally grown for stock feed, too.

Rutabaga

Tuesday, December 6, 2011

I boiled some up last night, following a recipe from the Fanny Farmer Cookbook. After they were tender, about 30 minutes, I drained them and added salt, butter and chopped paisley. Their flesh is firmer and richer than turnips, although quite similar. I can't believe how many baskets of turnips we have given away. 30 years ago, when Macon County had small family farms, you could not find a farm without a fall turnip patch, and certainly couldn't give a turnip away. If any of you turnip lovers want to try a rutabaga, we'd be happy to give you some.