

Cooking Corner: Roasting vegetables brings out great flavors to savor

by Margaret King

If you're aiming to win over a confirmed vegetable hater, here's a sure-fire strategy: Roast those veggies.

Roasted Baby Spring Vegetables features fingerling potatoes, baby carrots, radishes and asparagus. Photo by Anita L. Arambula. When vegetables are roasted — cooked in a hot oven with little or no liquid — their exteriors become crisp and caramelized and their sweetness concentrated, giving them a comfort-food appeal that you just don't get from a raw carrot stick or steamed broccoli floret.

"It makes vegetables so tasty that even people who don't like a certain vegetable find that they really love it," said Andrea Chesman, author of "The Roasted Vegetable" and other books on vegetable cookery.

"I have found converts among brussels sprouts haters. And I myself have never been a big fan of parsnips, but roasted parsnips are really wonderful."

The basic technique is simple — rub the vegetables with oil and season with coarse salt and a few grindings of pepper, then cook in a hot oven (400 F or higher), stirring once or twice, until the vegetables are lightly browned and tender.

You can add all sorts of accents — rosemary, garlic or mustard on potatoes; goat cheese or parmesan sprinkled on roasted asparagus; or balsamic vinegar on pearl onions, to name a few.

While roasting vegetables is a humble technique, it makes frequent appearances in chic restaurants.

The new Crescent Heights Kitchen & Lounge in downtown San Diego serves roasted salsify and cipolline onions with its Grilled Flat-iron Steak, and roasted butternut squash and rutabaga with Pan-Roasted Maple Leaf Duck Breast. A side dish of Chino Farm Baby Vegetables, which changes seasonally, recently featured roasted baby kohlrabi, turnips, brussels sprouts, carrots and cauliflower.

"I like the flavor profile you get when you roast," said Crescent Heights chef-owner David McIntyre. "You can just blanch a vegetable, but when you roast it, you give it a more caramelized flavor."

McIntyre's secrets for success include using a good-quality olive oil for coating the vegetables and a very hot oven. "You want to use a high temperature so you can get that caramelizing and browning," he said. "If you cook it at a low temperature, you will cook out the liquid. You want to kind of sear the liquid in so it maintains the natural flavor and juice."

Roasting is often associated with the root vegetables and hard squashes of fall and winter, but it's equally suitable for spring's asparagus and new potatoes or summer's tomatoes and eggplant.

"It adapts really easily to all the different summer vegetables, like summer squash and green beans," said Chesman. "They cook a little quicker, but it's the same process."

REASONS TO ROAST

Flavor and versatility aren't the only selling points:

If you're trying to eat more vegetables for health reasons, roasting helps you along by cooking down and

concentrating the veggies â€” and by making them so delicious that you just want to keep shoveling them in.

Chesman has learned to allow half a pound of green beans per person. "And when I roast green beans, they rarely even make it to the dining room," she added. "Everyone plucks them up from the roasting pan."

Got picky children? They're likely to be taken in by the sweetness of roasted veggies. "My own children never ate asparagus until I began roasting it," said Chesman, a mother of two boys who lives in Vermont. "I think it's because the roasting process brings out the sugars."

Roasted vegetables are great on their own or as a side dish with meat, but they can also be incorporated into pastas, tucked into sandwiches or used to top a tart or pizza.

Roasting also can be economical. It can turn some of the least expensive items in the produce section â€” potatoes, cauliflower, carrots â€” into fare fit for a special occasion.

As far as which vegetables are suitable for roasting, I keep adding new ones to my list. Carrots, parsnips, potatoes and onions are traditional choices. Some years ago I learned how roasting transforms asparagus. Then I discovered the happy results of roasting cauliflower, butternut squash and brussels sprouts. And recently green beans and broccoli have joined the roster.

Chesman, who has published several other cookbooks since "The Roasted Vegetable," said she still turns often to roasting. "When I'm not experimenting with a recipe, it's my go-to way of cooking vegetables," she said. "Everybody likes it, and it's so easy."

RULES FOR ROASTING

â€” Cut vegetables for roasting into uniform-sized pieces.

â€” Use a heavy metal roasting pan or rimmed baking sheet just large enough to hold the vegetables in a single layer. If the vegetables are piled up, they will steam rather than roast. If they are widely spaced, they may get too hot and burn. The pan's sides should not be more than 2 inches high. Lightly oil the pan or spray it with nonstick spray to make cleanup easier.

â€” Vegetables shrink as some of the moisture cooks out. This is what concentrates the flavor. Take this shrinkage into account in planning how much to roast, especially with watery vegetables.

â€” Rub vegetables with oil or melted butter to help them brown. You can season them with salt and freshly ground pepper before or after roasting.

â€” An oven temperature of 400 to 450 F works for most vegetables, although some recipes call for 500 F. Toss or stir the vegetables once or twice during roasting.

â€” Roasting times vary depending on the vegetable, the thickness of the pieces and your own preference. Times can range from about 15 minutes for green beans or asparagus to an hour for large beets or turnips. The finished vegetables should be tender and browned in places but should not appear charred.

SOURCES: "The Roasted Vegetable" by Andrea Chesman; "Vegetables" by James Peterson

MUSTARD-ROASTED POTATOES

Nonstick vegetable oil spray

1/2 cup whole-grain Dijon mustard or other coarse-grain mustard

2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil

2 tablespoons (1/4 stick) butter, melted

2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice

3 garlic cloves, minced

1 tablespoon dried oregano

1 teaspoon finely grated lemon peel

1 teaspoon coarse kosher salt

3 pounds 1-to 1 1/2-inch-diameter mixed unpeeled red-skinned and white-skinned potatoes, cut into 3/4-inch-wide wedges

Freshly ground pepper

Yields 8 servings.

Position one rack in top third of oven and one rack in bottom third of oven and preheat to 425 F. Spray two rimmed baking sheets with nonstick spray.

Whisk mustard, olive oil, butter, lemon juice, garlic, oregano, lemon peel and salt in a large bowl to blend. Add potatoes; sprinkle generously with freshly ground black pepper, and toss to coat. Divide potatoes between prepared baking sheets, leaving any excess mustard mixture behind in bowl. Spread potatoes in a single layer. Roast 20 minutes. Reverse baking sheets and roast until potatoes are crusty outside and tender inside, turning occasionally, about 20 minutes longer. Transfer potatoes to a serving bowl.

Nutritional analysis per serving: 214 calories, 7 g fat, 4 g protein, 35 g carbohydrates, 7 mg cholesterol, 389 mg sodium, 3.5 g dietary fiber.

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PARMESAN ROASTED ASPARAGUS

2 1/2 pounds fresh asparagus (about 30 large spears)

2 tablespoons good olive oil

1/2 teaspoon kosher salt

1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

1/2 cup freshly grated parmesan cheese

2 lemons cut in wedges, for serving

Yields 6 servings.

Preheat the oven to 400 F. If the asparagus stalks are thick, peel bottom half of each spear. Lay them in a single layer on a sheet pan and drizzle with olive oil. Sprinkle with salt and pepper. Rub spears to coat with oil and salt and pepper. Roast for about 15 minutes, until barely tender. Remove from oven, sprinkle with the parmesan cheese and return to the oven for another minute. Serve with lemon wedges.

Nutritional analysis per serving: 113 calories, 7 g fat, 7 g protein, 9 g carbohydrates, 6 mg cholesterol, 262 mg sodium, 4 g dietary fiber.

â€” Ina Garten, Foodnetwork.com.

ROASTED BROCCOLI AND CAULIFLOWER WITH LEMON AND GARLIC

1 head broccoli (about 1 pound), broken into 1-inch florets, stalks peeled and thinly sliced

1 large head cauliflower (about 2 pounds), broken into florets

3 tablespoons olive oil

4 garlic cloves, thinly sliced

2 lemons, thinly sliced

Coarse salt and ground pepper

Yields 4 servings.

Preheat oven to 450 F. On 2 rimmed baking sheets, toss broccoli and cauliflower with oil, garlic and lemons; season with salt and pepper. Roast until vegetables are browned and tender, about 25 minutes, rotating sheets from top to bottom and tossing vegetables once halfway through.

Nutritional analysis per serving: 194 calories, 11 g fat, 8 g protein, 22 g carbohydrates, 0 mg cholesterol, 461 mg sodium, 9 g dietary fiber.

â€” Everyday Food magazine, December 2008.

SOY ROASTED GREEN BEANS

2 tablespoons toasted sesame oil

2 tablespoons soy sauce

1 tablespoon rice vinegar or dry sherry

2 garlic cloves, minced

2 pounds green beans, ends trimmed

Freshly ground black pepper

Yields 4 servings.

Preheat oven to 450 F. Lightly oil a large roasting pan or 2 large baking sheets. In a small bowl, combine sesame oil, soy sauce, rice vinegar and garlic. Arrange green beans in a single uncrowded layer in the pan. Drizzle sauce over beans and roll until evenly coated.

Roast about 15 minutes, until beans are well browned and tender, shaking pan occasionally to ensure even cooking. Transfer beans to a serving bowl and season to taste with salt and pepper.

Nutritional analysis per serving: 138 calories, 7 g fat, 5 g protein, 18 g carbohydrates, 0 mg cholesterol, 911 mg sodium, 8 g dietary fiber.

â€™ "The Roasted Vegetable" by Andrea Chesman (Harvard Common Press).

ROASTED BABY SPRING VEGETABLES

3 tablespoons white balsamic vinegar (see note)

1 tablespoon chopped shallots

1 pound baby carrots with tops

3 tablespoons olive oil

1 teaspoon kosher salt

1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper

12 fingerling potatoes, halved lengthwise (about 1 1/4 pounds)

1 (6-ounce) bag radishes, halved (about 1 3/4 cups)

2 cups (2-inch) slices asparagus (about 1 pound)

1 tablespoon chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley

1 tablespoon chopped fresh chives

Yields 8 servings.

Preheat oven to 450 F. Combine vinegar and shallots in a small bowl; set aside. Trim green tops from carrots; discard tops. Combine carrots, olive oil, salt, pepper, potatoes and radishes in a roasting pan, tossing gently to combine. Roast for 20 minutes, or until vegetables begin to brown, stirring occasionally.

Remove pan from the oven; add shallot mixture and asparagus, tossing to combine. Return pan to oven; roast 10 minutes, or until vegetables are tender and browned. Stir in parsley and chives.

Note: White balsamic vinegar is sold at specialty food stores and some supermarkets. You can substitute regular balsamic vinegar, but it will darken the vegetables.

Nutritional analysis per serving: 134 calories, 5 g fat, 3 g protein, 18 g carbohydrates, 4 g fiber, 0 mg cholesterol, 282 mg sodium.

â€” Adapted from Cooking Light, March 2006.

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