

I wonder which common vegetable is the most maligned by the general public. I have thought in the past that it was the parsnip, since so few people seem to have a positive reaction to this most innocent of vegetables. After all, it is sweet—we all like sugar, easy to peel, relatively free of disease, and, I think, tasty. Still, many people say they would never eat a parsnip. It might be the beet that arouses many individuals' heated opinions, but, at least, there are as many fervent beet lovers as beet haters. And there are always a few people who just dislike anything green. I have trouble understanding that.

My vote for the most disliked vegetable this year, though, is another one that I particularly favor. How many people do you know that love rutabagas? It may have something to do with that name, a word that one can legitimately wonder about. How it is pronounced? What does it mean? Where did it come from?

I had to look this up. The word *rutabaga* comes from the old Swedish word *rotebagge* and if what I read is correct—always chancy with information gained on an internet search—it originated as words meaning root lump, a designation that quite well describes the rutabaga. Some indications are that the vegetable originated in Sweden and Finland about the same time, probably as a seed cross of cabbage and turnip.

This whole history makes the vegetable unacceptable to some people, I guess, since there are many who consider both cabbage and turnips to be distasteful vegetables. I don't believe there is any vegetable that I find unappealing, and I especially love a good rutabaga dish. In fact, I like raw rutabaga with salt.

We seldom called this vegetable rutabaga, though. To us, they were—and are—beggies, probably a dialectical corruption of the old Swedish words. My mother always put beggies in that combination of smoked pork and vegetables we called “boiled dinner.” She also cooked rutabaga slices in salted water and then fried them in butter. That is probably my favorite beggie dish.

When we lived in Sweden, I encountered *rotmos*, a combination of potatoes and rutabaga, boiled and masked together. That is one of our favorite ways to eat beggies. When the Cornish miners in the Upper Peninsula introduced a meat/vegetable hand pie to their fellow miners, the Finns took to the recipe immediately, and the pasty has become equally a Finnish/American tradition. One must have good rutabaga for a good pasty.

We had tried to grow beggies in the garden several times with very little success. This year, I did a good job of thinning the bed of plants, and they have produced a great crop. A winter of pasties, *rotmos*, and fried in butter beggies awaits us. But, I still believe that the rutabaga stands at the top of the list of the most underappreciated vegetables.