

Marion Kane: They may be high in fibre, vitamins and other nutrients but they're not high on our list of foods to serve at dinner parties. They are the so-called underdog vegetables, in particular parsnips and Brussels sprouts. Although they may appear strange or daunting, these veggies can actually be a boon, not only to your health but also to your palate. I'm Marion Kane, Food Sleuth® and welcome to my podcast "Sittin' in the Kitchen®." Today I'm joined by my friend and fellow foodie Mairlyn Smith to champion these oft-maligned vegetables.

I'm in my living room in Kensington Market with Mairlyn Smith. Our topic of the day: underdog vegetables. I am a supporter of underdogs everywhere.

Mairlyn Smith: Me too.

Marion: I believe in talking about foods that people don't like because mostly I think it's totally unfair.

Mairlyn: I do too. I think people had one bad experience. This is a bad example because I've been married so many times – you have one bad experience with one husband, doesn't mean you shouldn't get married again, and I did. So, there you go. If you have one bad experience with a fruit or vegetable you should give it another try.

Marion: Which segues nicely into the first vegetable I believe you're going to talk about.

Mairlyn: Drum roll, drum roll. It is Let's go for it Marion!

Marion: The Brussels sprout.

Mairlyn: People think they stink and they're little and they hate them. What is wrong that? We love them.

Marion: We could take the husband analogy here. Some of them do stink.

Mairlyn: But that's only when they're treated wrong. But that means it's your fault. I take that back. My mother used to cook Brussels sprouts. My grandmother taught my mother how to cook Brussels sprouts. You boiled the living death out of them for at least an hour and they were grey blobs of salty mush.

Marion: They exude a strange smell if they're overcooked. Is it not true?

Mairlyn: It's sulphur. It stinks, you're right, like some ex-husbands.

Marion: I had that experience with Brussels sprouts once. I was sautéing them, but I sautéed them for too long and they started to smell like rotten eggs.

Mairlyn: Yes, that's the sulphur part. Or if they're too old. If you've got them in your fridge too long they'll start to have that sulphur smell. A fresh Brussels sprout is better than an old one.

Marion: We've got rid of the bad news, let's concentrate on the positive and accentuate it. Why do you like Brussels sprouts Mairlyn Smith?

Mairlyn: I had them cooked the right way once and it was like, "What is this? It cannot be a Brussels sprout." The way I think you should cook them is you lightly steam them and then you sauté them. You can sauté them in garlic and a little bit of maple syrup and dried cranberries for the fall, and they're fantastic. I love them like that. What's your favourite way to go with them?

Marion: I like to cook them with a little bacon or pancetta and I hash them. You see, a whole Brussels sprout is a little bit hard to cook because they do remain hard in the middle. They are a mini cabbage, are they not?

Mairlyn: That's it totally. They're in the same family so they have the same health benefits too, which is reducing cancer, heart disease. They're a brilliant food to eat for health.

Marion: They are a little baby, teeny bright green cabbage. Anyway, I hash them, which means to slice them fairly thin so that they're in shreds and I sauté them in a bit of oil - you don't need much oil if you use bacon or pancetta. I add a little white wine and maybe some herbs. I don't add much and they're delicious. They're kind of unrecognizable too.

Mairlyn: You've got a good point there. When I do mine, I cut them in halves, and they sort of fall apart in the frying pan so it looks kind of like green stuff with the maple syrup and the cranberries. They have a different flavour too and a different texture. I think

these people just boil the heck out of them. I don't even like them boiled; they taste awful.

Marion: In other words, they have been ruined for people by Brussels sprout abuse.

Mairlyn: Yes! Do not be one of them because you will go to Brussels sprout hell.

Marion: There's even a Brussels sprout hashtag on Twitter, isn't there? We both contribute to this. We're trying to raise the popularity and the awareness of the merits of the Brussels sprout, are we not?

Mairlyn: Yes, we are. We want to have our own Brussels Sprout Day.

Marion: Let's move on to our second vegetable. We are only going to talk about two. The second vegetable that is much maligned, underrated and an underdog is....

Mairlyn: The anemic carrot called a parsnip. People think it's an anemic carrot but it's not. A parsnip! I love parsnips, don't you?

Marion: Of course I do. But say your bit first.

Mairlyn: I think they're wonderful because they've got tons of potassium in them, but I love the way they taste. They're my secret ingredient in a whole bunch of things like soups. I make the best turkey gravy. I cook the turkey on a bed of parsnips and leeks. I smoosh them up and then I make the gravy and I put it through a strainer. How do you cook yours?

Marion: What do people do to parsnips to give them a bad rap?

Mairlyn: Boil the living daylights out of them. I come from a family that boiled the living daylights out of anything that Mother Nature gave you.

Marion: Excuse me, but is your heritage English?

Mairlyn: It is, darling. English, Scots and Irish.

Marion: It's time for me to intercede with a Jewish cooking tip. Parsnips are the secret ingredient to Jewish chicken soup. They add sweetness. Here's how I make it: I put a whole chicken in a pot, cover it with water, add an onion - even with the skin on - carrot, some sprigs of thyme and at least one parsnip. Without the parsnip it's not the same.

Mairlyn: It does have a certain level of, not perfume-y, a kind of another note. I can see that would even out your stock. I'm going to use that. I've never put parsnips in broth before.

Marion: Thank you Mairlyn.

Mairlyn: It was so much fun Marion.

Marion: That was me, Marion Kane, Food Sleuth®, with friend and fellow foodie Mairlyn Smith, championing underdog vegetables. Find more food sleuthing stories on my website marionkane.com, or in iTunes. Mairlyn's website is mairlynsmith.com. Thank you for listening.