

Down to the Roots: History and Cultural Insights of Turnips



Cultural Spotlight

Chinese turnip cakes are a popular dish often made to celebrate the Chinese New Year. Chinese Turnips (also called Daikon radishes) are the star of the dish. For best results the turnip should be heavy.



Chinese turnip cakes are savory rice cakes. Though many restaurants and home recipes incorporate a variety of different ingredients, they often have meat, Chinese turnips, mushrooms, shrimp, Chinese sausage, scallions and other baking ingredients like flour, cornstarch and salt.



Turnips are thought to have originated in Middle and Eastern Asia. Early colonists brought turnips to the United States and they have been cultivated here ever since.

Today there are over 30 varieties of turnips!

Turnips were used for the original Jack-O-Lanterns, even before pumpkins! Jack-O-Lanterns originated in Ireland and were made out of turnips and other root vegetables and used to steer evil spirits away.

When people from Ireland immigrated to the United States in the 1800's and discovered the pumpkin, they made the switch to carving those instead. In 2015 when there was a pumpkin shortage in England, people had to "return to their roots" and carve turnips for trick or treaters.



History Check:

During the days of the Roman Empire people saved turnips to throw at people they didn't like and unpopular public figures.