

SAVOUR

There is more to this humble vegetable than meets the eye

Sweet carrot packs a punch

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Adrian Van Luyk has been harvesting carrots and onions out of the rich soil of the Holland Marsh for almost 40 years.

And even after bringing in thousands of bushels of carrots, he still loves the crunch of a freshly pulled Bradford-grown carrot.

But when it comes to really indulging in the fruits of his labours, his favourite dish hands down is his wife's carrot pie — a rich mixture of eggs, carrots and cream cheese.

Despite its humble name, the carrot pie recipe is one the Bradford Carrot Producers and Packers refer to as "straight from Ireland and half way to cheesecake".

Perfectly sinful may be more like it, according to Van Luyk.

"It's not good for me because I eat too much of it, but that's the one I love," Van Luyk confessed. "My slices are three times as big as they should be."

And while his consumption of carrots may be above the national norm, the average Canadian consumes about 18 pounds of carrots per year, and almost 90 per cent of Ontario's carrots are produced in Simcoe County and York Region.

Sweet and crunchy, carrots are packed with vitamins as well as more natural sugar than almost any other vegetable.

And the sweetest carrots are the ones left to grow through to maturity. Picked too early, the vegetables will have mild flavour but not the desired sweet crunch — important when the nutritive value is highest when carrots are deep orange and eaten raw.

On top of being tastier than your average veggie, the old wives tale about carrots being good for your eyes is actually true — carrots are an excellent source of vitamin A, which is necessary for good night vision.

And over time, the carrots appearing in produce sections, grated into baked goods and sliced around pot-roast dinners have been improving in flavour, thanks to the efforts of farmers, scientists and genetics.

Plant breeders have done a lot of work improving taste and boosting nutritional value in carrots.

"Over the last number of years, farmers have been very interested in different varieties and giving a better taste," Van Luyk

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