

## **Authentically Italian and at their best!**

Enoteca Turi seeks out some typical Italian winter vegetables

The wonderful and distinctive flavours of Italian regional cuisine are found in the different ways vegetables are prepared. Winter is the season of some of the most interesting, yet little known varieties. Due to their seasonality, they are available for 5-6 months, but only at their best for three. From north to south, the combination of differing geographical position, climate and heritage has created varied styles of cooking them, with each region having a preference for certain ingredients and style of preparation which are uniquely its own.

*Cardi* – cardoons, part of the asteracea family is closely related to the artichoke and thistle, and is often called artichoke thistle. First mentioned in the 4<sup>th</sup> c BC by Greek writer Theophrastus, it was eaten by Greeks, Romans and throughout the middle ages. It has lost popularity in recent times due to its lengthy preparation, but is still traditional in Piedmont and the central Italian regions of Umbria, Tuscany and Marche. The stems of the leaves of this plant (reaching up to 1m in height) are used, and after peeling and discarding the stringy bits, they are boiled until tender, which can take a number of hours. After boiling, they can be braised, deep-fried, or baked with parmesan and béchamel (parmigiana) and a number of other ways according to the region. Rich in anti oxidants and fibre, it has purifying properties.

*Cavolo nero*, an interesting brassica from Tuscany, similar to curly kale, has dark green leaves which intensify in colour when cooked, hence its name black cabbage. It is extremely versatile – can be boiled and sauteed with garlic, or braised, and is the other main ingredient in *ribollita*, a traditional Tuscan bean soup. It makes a wonderful garnish for pork, liver, game or richly flavoured fish. Rich in vitamins A, B and C and iron, its taste is quite intense with a combination of cabbage and spinach flavours

*Finocchio* – fennel, part of the Umbelliferae family, is found throughout Europe, both wild and cultivated; the cultivated varieties grow a bulb, which is at its best when white, round and smooth. Its seeds are used in many recipes for flavouring. Versatile as a vegetable, it can be eaten raw in salad, thinly sliced, eg in Sicily *insalata di arancie e finocchio*, blood orange, fennel and red onion salad. Braised with olive oil and garlic, or baked with butter and heaps of parmesan, it is a great side order for main courses, especially sea bass and pork. It is popular in Marche, where the term *in porchetta* after a dish is used to indicate its presence

*Cime di rape*, part of the brassica family, is a sub species of the turnip, without the tuber, related to mustard, bok choy and mizuna, and is harvested when broccoli-like florets start to appear. Although found in many central and southern Italian regions, it is in Puglia where it is most valued. The tender leaves and florets can be boiled or steamed. When boiled, it is delicate and sweet with a mild mustard aftertaste; when steamed in its own water, its flavours are much more intense and pungent. A classic Puglian dish with this vegetable is *orecchiette con cime di rape*, where its combination with garlic, anchovy and cherry tomato produces a dish of surprisingly rich flavours and deliciously satisfying taste

*Cicoria catalogna*, or *puntarelle*, asparagus chicory, is part of a large group including radicchio, Belgian chicory and the various endives. It is found throughout central and southern Italy, with the best sub species, *cicoria di Galatina* coming from Puglia. Its sprouting asparagus-like tips are crunchy and when cooked it is sweet with a slight bitter aftertaste. Versatile, it can be used raw in salad, boiled and dressed with olive oil, or sautéed with garlic and olive oil. In Puglia, it is combined with egg and parmesan in a dish that could be

described as a steamed omelette, and in Abruzzo, used in the traditional soup, *Cicoria cacio e ova* with cheese and egg. It is rich in vitamins and minerals, good as a digestive and diuretic.

**For more info on how to cook or source these veg, email [giuseppe@enotecaturi.com](mailto:giuseppe@enotecaturi.com)**