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Brassica oleracea var. *gemmifera*

BRUSSELS SPROUT is a biennial.

It is also known as *Brysselkål* (Swedish), *Choux de Bruxelles* (French), *Rosenkohl* (German), *Ruusukaali* (Finnish), and *Sprossenkohl* (German).

Warning – the plant can be poisonous for animals, if fed to them in large quantities over long periods.

Oleracea means ‘vegetable- or cooking herb-like or of the herb-, vegetable or kitchen garden’.). *Gemmifera* is derived from Latin *gemma* (bud) and *-fer* (bearing, carrying) components.

According to some authorities the Belgians believe that Brussels sprout was introduced to them from Italy by the Roman soldiers others point to a tradition that the vegetable was cultivated in the area of what is now known as Belgium from at least 1200. Yet others note that the first known description of it only dates back to 1587, a century before a large number of non-botanists knew of the plant’s existence. Thus it is not known when Brussels sprouts were eaten in their modern form and this may explain one recent authority’s claim that the little buds have only been used since the 17th Century. Authorities believed the vegetable reached North America in the early 19th Century and note that it was one of the plants being cultivated by Thomas Jefferson (1743-1826) the 3rd President of the United States, on his Virginian estates in 1812.

In the last half of the 20th Century the vegetable had the greatest following in Britain where it had only appeared for the first time in the mid-19th Century. It is another Western vegetable now eaten in China.

It is fascinating to note the different ways in which a particular plant is perceived. In 2003 some records showed that trendy shops in New York were displaying pots of this species for sale in full bud as an ornamental alternative to the ubiquitous bay tree. Apparently they were popular in pairs and purchasers were advised to display them outdoors to avoid their pungent smell which might be penetrating inside in a warm confined space.