

WINTER SQUASH- RICH SOURCE OF FLAVOR AND NUTRIENTS



Fall is the time of year to harvest winter squash. Your fingernail can help you tell the difference between summer and winter squash. The skin of summer squash (zucchini) yields easily to your fingernail; winter squash is hard and does not yield. Winter squash has a longer storage life and may be kept for as long as three months at home. That's even better news when you realize how nutrient rich and economical these squash can be. Depending on the variety you choose, a ½ cup serving of cooked winter squash may provide almost 100% of the RDA for Vitamin A for an entire day for women.

There are several different varieties of winter squash available to choose from. Many of us are familiar with acorn and butternut. **Acorn** is usually green in color with deep ridges and is in the shape of an acorn. The acorn squash does not contain as much beta carotene as other winter squash, but it is a rich source of calcium with ½ cup cooked acorn squash providing about 5% of the RDA for calcium at a cost of only 50 calories. **Butternut** squash is an elongated bell shaped squash with a smooth tan skin. Its flesh is deep orange-a good indicator of being a rich source of Vitamin A-and it tastes sweeter than the acorn squash.

Following are some other varieties that you may find locally. **Buttercup** is a turban shape at the blossom end with dark and light green stripes on the outside and orange flesh on the inside. **Hubbard** squash has a bumpy skin that may be either dark green or orange. They are usually quite large-5 to 10 pounds each. You may find hubbard squash precut in your local market. **Spaghetti squash** is quite unique. When cooked, the flesh of the squash forms strands quite similar to spaghetti. Many individuals enjoy it served with their favorite pasta sauce. **Pumpkin** is a winter squash that we are all familiar with, but most of the domestically grown pumpkins are varieties best suited for decoration. For cooked pumpkin or pie filling, use sugar pumpkins, which are smaller and sweeter.

When selecting squash, look for squash that has a dry, smooth rind with no cracks or soft spots. You want the rind to be dull; a shiny rind may indicate that the squash was harvested too early and may not have the full sweetness of a mature squash. Acorn squash may

have splashes of orange but avoid those with more than half of the rind being orange. Butternut squash should not have any green tinge to it. When possible, choose squash with a dry stem attached. When buying a cut squash, look for good inside color and fine-grained flesh.

You may store squash for three months or longer in a cool, dry place. Storage in the refrigerator will shorten the life of the squash by encouraging deterioration unless you are planning to keep it for only a week or two. Cut squash may be kept in the refrigerator for up to one week if wrapped tightly.

Preparation of squash is quite simple. Many varieties include stickers with easy to use directions. Begin by washing off any dirt. The next step is usually to cut it, but the rind can be so hard that you may want to try this tip. Put the clean squash in the microwave for 3 minutes on full power. For this short of time, it is not necessary to prick or poke the squash and it will not explode, but it will soften just a little so that it will be easier to cut. It will be hot when you remove it from the microwave so remember to use potholders. Then make a shallow cut to use as a guide for the knife. Place the blade in the cut and tap on the base of the knife with your fist. After you have cut the squash through, scoop out the seeds. Acorn squash is often left in halves; butternut may need to be cut into smaller chunks. Finish cooking in the microwave or conventional oven.

SPICED WINTER SQUASH Serves 4

- 2 cups cooked butternut squash
- 2 Tbsp. skim milk
- 2 Tbsp. apple juice concentrate
- Pinch cinnamon
- Pinch nutmeg
- Black pepper to taste



Combine the squash with the remaining ingredients in a microwave safe dish and stir well. Microwave until heated thoroughly (about 5-6 minutes). You can also heat this dish in the oven. Use an ovenproof dish and keep covered. It takes about 20 minutes at 350°F.

Per serving: 60 calories, 0.5 g fat, 0 g sat fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 5 mg sodium, 13 g. carbohydrate, 3 g fiber, 4 g sugars, 1 g. protein. Diabetic Exch.: 1 bread.

Source: Food & Health communications, Inc. 1999

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