



Cornucopia of Squash

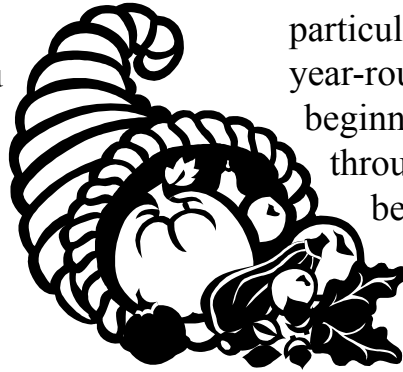
What comes in many colors and sizes, easy to prepare, tasty, healthy and plentiful now? If you said winter squash, you are correct. Winter Squash comes in many colors, orange, yellow, green, red, and vary in size from a few ounces to 15 pounds or more.

Squash is an American food. It sustained native Americans for more than five thousand years and then helped nourish the early European settlers, who quickly made the vegetable an important part of their diet.

Winter Squash

The many varieties of winter squash are harvested at a mature stage, when their shells have grown hard and inedible. Because of these protective shells, winter squash can be harvested in the fall and stored several months, throughout the winter, in a cool, dry place.

The yellow or orange flesh of winter squashes is rich in complex carbohydrates and Vitamin A. Some types, such as Hubbard and butternut, contain more than 100 percent of the Recommended Daily Allowance for Vitamin A and only 40 calories in a 1-cup serving.



Availability: Some winter squashes, particularly acorn, are in good supply year-round. But most are at their peak beginning in late summer and continuing throughout the fall and winter, they become scarce in spring.

Shopping Tips: Look for a squash with a smooth, dull, dry rind, free of cracks or soft spots.

A winter squash should feel heavy for its size. If possible, choose squash with the stem attached. The stem should be rounded and dry, not collapsed, blackened or moist.

Varieties: There are many varieties of squash. Most varieties can be substituted for one another in recipes. The three most popular varieties are acorn, butternut, and Hubbard.

Preparation: Rinse off any dirt before using.

Baking: To bake, halve small squash length-wise, scoop out the seeds and strings. Cut large squash into serving-sized pieces. Place squash, cut-side down in a foil-lined pan. Pour 1/4 -inch of water into the pan, cover with foil, and bake in a 350^o to 400^o F. oven until the squash is tender when pierced with a knife. Halfway through baking, the squash halves may be

turned, cut-side up, brushed with melted butter or oil, and sprinkled with brown sugar and spices.

Cooking Time: Squash halves or whole small pumpkins, 40 to 45 minutes; cut-up squash, 15 to 25 minutes.

Microwaving: Arrange squash halves, cut-side up, in a shallow microwaveable dish, cover and cook until tender, rotating dish halfway through the cooking time. Let stand 5 minutes after cooking.
Cooking Time: for squash halves, 7 to 10 minutes; for chunks, 8 minutes.

Serving suggestions: Baked or steamed winter squash is delicious mashed or pureed, like sweet potatoes. To enhance its natural sweetness, combine squash with any of the following; baked or steamed pears or apples, bananas, chopped cranberries; lemon, lime, or orange juice; almond or vanilla extract; fresh or powdered ginger, curry power; cinnamon; nutmeg; mace; cardamom; cloves; allspice or pumpkin pie spice; brown sugar; maple syrup; or honey. For a savory dish, mash the cooked squash with sautéed onions or garlic and herbs, or combine chunks of squash with cooked corn, tomatoes, and bell peppers.

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Stuffed Squash

1 medium acorn squash or other small squash

Filling:

1 medium apples, peeled, or desired, cored and chopped
1 tablespoons water

Topping:

2 tablespoons brown sugar
2 tablespoons chopped pecans
½ tablespoon butter or margarine
1 teaspoon all-purpose flour
¼ teaspoon cinnamon

Scoop out seeds from squash halves. Place cut-side down on microwave baking dish. Cover with plastic wrap. Microwave at high 6 minutes, or until fork tender, rotating dish ½ turn after half the cooking time. Let stand while preparing filling. 1-1 qt casserole combine apples and water. Cover. Microwave at high 2 to 3 minutes, or until tender, stirring after half the cooking time. Set aside.

Turn squash cut-side up. Place one half of apples in each half. Sprinkle one half of topping on each. Cover with wax paper. Microwave at high 1½ to 2 minutes, or until topping melts. Serves 2

Nutrition Info. per serving: 260 calories, 8 gm fat, 5 mg cholesterol, 45 mg sodium, 7 gm fiber.