

SIMPLY GOOD FOOD

ACORN SQUASH

This dark green squash may have distinctive orange markings. A small squash, it is usually about 4 inches in diameter and 6 to 8 inches wide, with deep ridged furrows in the skin. The flesh is yellow to orange; the seed cavity is relatively large. Because of its size, acorn squash is excellent for baking on the half-shell with butter and brown sugar or for stuffing.

PREPARATION

Cut into wedges or halves with a large, heavy knife; remove seeds; peel squash using a sharp knife.

TOASTING

To toast squash seeds, rinse them well and dry thoroughly. Toss seeds with oil to coat lightly. Salt to taste and arrange on a baking sheet. Toast in a 325 degree F oven until crisp.

The many varieties of squash are all members of the gourd family and are native to the New World. Squash (and other gourds) can grow quite large; in the garden, they are recognized by their trailing vines, large leaves, and handsome blossoms. Summer squash varieties are eaten while soft and immature; most winter varieties, such as acorn squash, are allowed to mature, developing hard skins and starchy meat.

Winter squash varieties may be cut into wedges or halves and baked in their skins until tender; peeled, cut into chunks, and boiled or steamed until tender; or cooked and mashed with butter, brown sugar, and cream. Small halves may be stuffed with a seasoned meat mixture and baked. Cooked peeled pieces can be pureed and added to soup, or used as a filling for pastas and pies, or as part of a batter. The hard seeds of winter squash may be cleaned, toasted, and salted for a delicious companion to cocktails.

AVAILABILITY

Winter squash are excellent keepers and may be stored for several months. Their flesh is generally moist when cooked and ranges from starchy to quite sweet. Some winter squash are available the year around, but peak supplies are in fall and winter.

SELECTION

Pick winter squash that are firm and have hard skins; they should be heavy for their size. Precut wedges should look moist but not mushy.



BAKED SQUASH SLICES

For eye appeal, alternate squash slices in the baking dish.

1 small acorn squash
1 large zucchini squash
olive oil, for drizzling
salt and freshly ground pepper, to taste

1. Wash both squashes. Halve acorn squash; remove seeds; and peel. Cut zucchini in half lengthwise. Cut both squashes into 1/4 inch wide slices and arrange in shallow baking dish.
2. Drizzle oil over squash and season to taste. Cover and bake in 450 degree F oven until tender (15 to 20 minutes).

Serves 4.

SQUASH SOUP FOR SMALL FAMILIES

This is a small yield recipe. This soup tastes very close to beef stew and is remarkably thick even though it contains no cream or eggs.

1/4 cup margarine
1 medium white onion
3 or 4 cups cooked pumpkin or other squash
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/2 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 1/2 cups soup stock

Chop the onion coarsely. Melt the margarine in a large saucepan. Stir the onion into the melted margarine, add the salt, pepper, and red pepper (optional), and cook until the onion is very brown but not burned, about 30 minutes, on low to medium heat. Stir frequently and keep covered.

Add the cooked squash and stir in the vegetable stock. Bring to a boil, reduce heat, and simmer for at least 45 minutes, covered, on low to medium heat.

If the soup seems too watery, simmer uncovered until it reduces. Serve hot, topped with cilantro or parsley (optional).

Supporting State Extension Goal: Health, Safety and Well Being

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