



What's So Great About Winter Squash?

- Winter squash are good to excellent sources of vitamin A, beta-carotene, potassium, vitamin C and fiber.
- Winter squash also contains niacin, folate, and iron.
- Winter squash is low in calories. It is fat free and cholesterol free.
- Each type varies in texture, aroma and flavor. Winter squash can be prepared with sweet or savory flavors.
- Winter squash goes well with meats, fruits, and other vegetables.



Selecting and Storing Winter Squash

Winter squash is harvested when fully mature in September and October. It is widely available until late winter.



Look for:

- A hard, tough rind with the stem attached.
- Squash that is heavy for its size (meaning a thick wall and plenty of edible flesh).

Avoid: Squash with cuts, punctures, sunken spots, or moldy spots on the rind. These are signs of decay. A tender rind means that the squash is not ripe. Unripe squash lacks flavor.

Storage

Winter squash can keep for up to three months if stored in a cool dry place. Squash stores best with part of the stem still attached to help retain its moisture.

- Once cut open, store squash wrapped in plastic in the refrigerator for 4 to 5 days.
- Cooked squash can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for 4 to 5 days.
- Frozen cooked squash stays fresh for up to a year.

Cooking Winter Squash

Winter squash can be cut in halves or pieces. Dress any cooked winter squash with butter and herbs, a cream sauce, cheese sauce, maple syrup and nuts, marinara sauce or stewed fruit. Any type of mashed or pureed squash can be used in the place of canned pumpkin in soups, pies, cookies or quick breads. Chunks of squash can be added to soups, stews and casseroles.

Preparing Winter Squash:

To cook them, first remove fibers and seeds. Wash the exterior of the squash just before using. The seeds are scooped out before or after cooking. Then bake, steam, or boil the squash.

Using Water When Cooking Winter Squash:

- When water is used in cooking the squash, the quantity of water should be kept small to avoid losing flavor and nutrients.

Peeling Winter Squash:

- Because this rind makes most squash difficult to peel, it's easier to cook the unpeeled squash, and then scoop out the cooked flesh. As many recipes do require peeling (and cutting) first. Use a vegetable peeler to remove the skin and when cutting hard winter squashes.

Cutting Winter Squash:

- Winter squash have a hard skin and flesh (this includes acorn, buttercup, butternut, calabaza, delicate, Hubbard, spaghetti, sweet dumpling, and Turban, as well as pumpkin).
- To cut winter squash in half, grasp the squash firmly and use a sharp knife to slice through to the center. Then flip and cut the other side until the squash falls open. Remove and discard the seeds.
- **Hint:** Place the whole winter squash in the microwave for 3 minutes; then cut it easily, remove seeds, add butter, etc, and put into hot oven to bake. (Perforate with knife before putting in microwave so it won't explode.)

To Bake Winter Squash:

- Using a whole (1 to 1 1/2 pound) winter squash, pierce the rind with a fork and bake in a 350 degree oven 45 minutes.
- Acorn and butternut squash are frequently cut in half, baked, and served in the shell.

Boil or Steam Winter Squash:

- Cut into quarters or rings 25 minutes or until tender. Boil or mash winter squash just as you would potatoes. Add peeled squash cubes to your favorite soups, stews, beans, gratins and vegetable ragouts.

To Make Squash Puree:

- Cut winter squash (any type) in half lengthwise and remove seeds. Place squash, cut side down, in a shallow pan on aluminum foil or Silpat-lined baking sheet.
- Bake at 350 degrees F. until squash is soft, approximately 45 to 60 minutes (depending on the size of your squash). Remove from oven and let cool. When cool, scoop out the cooked flesh/pulp (discarding the shell), place the pulp in a food processor and process until smooth.
- Measure out the amount you need for your recipe, and reserve any remaining pulp (either in the refrigerator or freeze) for other uses. NOTE: This Squash Puree may be substituted in any recipe that calls for pumpkin puree.

To Microwave Winter Squash:

- Place halves or quarters, cut side down, in a shallow dish; add 1/4 cup water. Cover tightly and microwave on HIGH 6 minutes per pound.
- Whole Squash - Poke squash all over with a fork. Microwave the squash at full power (High) approximately 5 to 10 minutes (depending on size of squash).

Testing Winter Squash for Doneness:

- Test for doneness by piercing with a fork. Fork should easily pierce peel and flesh. Let sit until cool enough to handle, cut in half lengthwise, scoop out seeds (if needed), and proceed with recipe or eat.

For more on how to cook Winter Squash and plenty of Winter Squash recipies visit
www.whatscookingamerica.net/SquashRecipies.htm