



Light Side

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Squash – the food of autumn, from A to Z

Squash is the ultimate comfort food of the cool fall months. With its smooth and creamy textures, buttery flavors and nutty undertones, squash is a complement to any meal, whether as a side dish or the main attraction. It can be tossed into a savory sauce, sweetened with brown sugar or pureed into a soup. It's versatile and delicious.

Related to pumpkins and melons, squash can be divided into two basic categories: summer squash and winter squash.

Summer squashes, such as yellow squash and zucchini, are harvested when the plants are immature and the rinds are tender and edible.

Winter squashes, however, have thicker, generally inedible skins. Winter squashes, including acorn, butternut, buttercup, carnival, Hubbard and spaghetti, are harvested during the fall months.

From A to Z – acorn to zucchini – squash is a fall favorite that is as versatile as it is delicious.

Acorn squash. This squash has sweet, buttery, yellow-orange flesh that easily transforms into a variety of seasonal dishes. Pureed with steamed Bartlett pears and mingled with flavors of curry and ginger, this squash makes a hearty, delicious and memorable soup.

Prep tips: Because the rind is very hard, pierce the skin with a knife in two or three locations, place on a plate and microwave for two minutes. This will soften the skin and rind and make it easier to cut. Simply cut this squash in half and roast with the rind intact. Scoop out seeds before roasting, and season the squash or fill with additional

ingredients after it has been roasted. Each half makes a single serving.

Buttercup squash. This winter variety is similar in taste to butternut but slightly sweeter. Because its orange-yellow flesh is more dense, its texture is drier than butternut. With slightly nutty flavor and sweet overtones, buttercup is often baked and simply seasoned with margarine or butter and brown sugar. For a savory dish, stuff a halved, steamed buttercup with cooked turkey sausage, celery and onions. Also works well in soups, muffins or pies.

Prep tips: Trim ends; cut in half lengthwise. Scoop out seeds. Add a small amount of water to the dish, then oven roast until squash is tender.

Butternut squash. A good one to try for those new to preparing squash, this variety resembles sweet potatoes in taste and texture, and it melds with nutmeg, brown sugar and cinnamon. For a gourmet spin, combine butternut with thyme or sage, onion, blue cheese and bread crumbs. Cut in chunks and cook on low in a slow cooker or bake in an oven. Butternut is also a good match for hearty steaks or roast chicken.

Prep tips: Cook in a slow cooker or microwave until tender. To steam, cut unpeeled squash in chunks; place in a covered dish with a little water. Cook until tender. Cool then scoop pulp from rind. Chunked raw butternut squash is a great addition to stews or curries.

Spaghetti squash. This one gets its name from stringy flesh that resembles spaghetti. When cooked, spaghetti squash strands

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This month's On the Light Side is written by registered dietitian Jenny Thompson

Herb-roasted squash

Serves 16 (¾ cup each)

- 1 butternut squash, peeled, seeded and cut in 1-inch cubes
- 2 acorn squashes, peeled, seeded and cut in 1-inch cubes
- 2 buttercup squashes, peeled, seeded and cut in 1-inch cubes
- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 tablespoons balsamic vinegar
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 3 tablespoons dried parsley
- 1 teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon black pepper
- ¾ teaspoon rosemary
- ¾ teaspoon thyme
- Pine nuts, optional



Instructions: Preheat oven to 475°F. Line an 11×15-inch rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil. Place squash cubes in a large bowl; set aside. Whisk together olive oil, vinegar, garlic, parsley, salt, black pepper, rosemary and thyme. Pour over squash and toss to coat. Spread squash in a single layer on prepared baking sheet. Bake for 35 to 45 minutes, stirring every 15 minutes, until squash is tender and golden brown. Garnish with pine nuts, if desired.

Nutrition facts per serving: 100 calories, 7 g fat, 1 g saturated fat, 0 g trans fat, 0 mg cholesterol, 200 mg sodium, 10 g carbohydrates, 3 g fiber, 2 g sugar, 1 g protein.

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may be used as a pasta substitute. The mild flavor of this squash complements dressings and sauces. The larger a spaghetti squash, the more flavorful. One cup of this cooked squash contains 42 calories, 10 grams of carbs and less than 0.5 grams of fat. Contrast that with one cup of cooked pasta, which contains about 225 calories, 44 grams of carbohydrates and 1.5 grams of fat.

Prep tips: Prick the squash all over, then roast until tender. When cool enough to handle, cut the squash in half lengthwise. Scoop the seeds and fibrous strings from the center, then gently scrape the tines of a fork around the squash edge to form strands of pulp.

Zucchini squash. An excellent source of vitamin C, zucchini has delicate flavor and requires little more than a quick sauté in olive oil with or without fresh herbs. For garden-fresh flavor, toss chunks of zucchini into stir-fry or on homemade pizza. Zucchini can be grilled with veggie kabobs or added to soup or ratatouille.

Prep tips: Sauté, roast, steam or grill zucchini to highlight its delicate texture. Or simmer it

in soups. Slice or shred raw zucchini for salads or baked goods. There is no need to peel the squash; simply rinse, trim the ends and prepare according to a recipe.

All squash packs a nutritional punch. Orange and yellow varieties of squash, such as butternut squash, are especially high in vitamin A, which helps to keep your eyes and skin healthy and helps to protect against infections.

To estimate serving size

One medium squash weighs about two pounds, the equivalent of about four cups chopped or two cups mashed, and makes four servings.

Pick the perfect squash

- As a general rule, the heavier the squash relative to its size, the more flavorful and moist it will be.
- Choose a squash without cracks or soft areas.
- Make sure the stem is intact, firm and dry.
- Look for a squash that is rich and

deep in its respective coloring.

- Squash skin should have a dull matte appearance. Shiny skin indicates that the squash has been harvested too early.
- Small squash are more tender and tasty than large ones, except in the case of spaghetti squash.

Storing squash

- Store uncut winter squash for two to three months (one to two months for spaghetti squash) in a cool, dry, dark location, such as a basement.
- Once cut, place winter squash in a resealable plastic bag and store in the refrigerator up to four days (two days for spaghetti squash).
- To freeze winter squash, cook first. Puree, mash or chunk, and store in airtight freezer bags up to one year.
- Store summer squash, such as zucchini, up to three days wrapped in paper towels in a plastic bag in the refrigerator.
- To freeze summer squash, slice in ½-inch pieces and steam for four minutes. Drain, cool and seal in airtight freezer bags. Or shred raw zucchini and freeze it for baking later. Summer squash will keep up to 10 months in the freezer.

