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Winter Squash

Food \$ense Guide to Eating Fresh Fruits and Vegetables

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Utah Local Fresh Season: Fall, mid-August through October.

Availability: Winter squash are harvested in the fall. They are available at farmer's markets during that time, and also year-round at most grocery stores.

Eating: Winter squash is always cooked before eating, and because of its tough skins, only the inside flesh is edible. Most winter squash can be interchanged in recipes.

Selecting: Select well shaped squash with hard tough skins. The gourd should be heavy for its size. Stay away from squash that have soft spots, moldy patches, cut or punctured skins. Soft thin skin indicates an immature fruit. The skins of a fully ripe squash are inedible.

The most common varieties of winter squash grown in Utah are:

Acorn squash— A smaller acorn shaped squash with dark green or orange skin and light orange-yellow flesh that is ideal for baking.

Butternut squash— Pear shaped squash with a pale orange or tan skin and darker orange flesh. It has a smaller seed pocket at the bottom of the pear shape.

Hubbard squash— A green squash noted for its bumpy thick skin and orange-yellow flesh. These squash generally grow quite large. They mash well and have a smooth texture.

Spaghetti squash— Yellow-skinned squash with lighter yellow, fibrous, translucent, stringy flesh. Mild flavored and can be served like pasta.

Banana squash— A large, long squash with a light

orange skin and darker orange flesh. It is shaped like a large banana. Mild flavored with a soft creamy texture generally purchased as pre-cut pieces.

Cleaning and Preparing: To clean, scrub winter squash in cool running water before cooking or cutting. Do not use soap or dish detergents.

Storing: Winter squash do not need to be washed before storing. Store whole squash in a cool (45°-50°F), dry place. If stored properly, whole winter squash can last up to 3 months. Cut squash should be wrapped in plastic wrap and refrigerated.

Cooking: Most squash varieties can be substituted for each other in recipes, with the exception of spaghetti squash

Microwaving: Wash smaller whole squash. Pierce several times with a knife. For larger squash, cut in half, remove the seeds and strings. Place cut side down in a microwave-safe baking dish. Pour ¼ inch of water into the bottom of the dish. Pierce squash several times with a knife. Microwave on high power for 6 to 7 minutes, then let stand for 5 minutes. (Microwave cooking times are provided as a guide. Cooking times vary due to differences in microwaves and size of squash. Check for desired doneness.)

Baking: Clean whole squash and pierce several times with sharp knife. Place in baking dish and bake at 400° F uncovered until tender when pierced with a fork. If cooking at a lower temperature, increase baking time. Cut squash should be cleaned

with the seeds and strings removed and cut into pieces or halved. (Spaghetti squash should only have the seeds removed.) Place the squash in a baking dish cut side up; halved squash cut side down. Pour ¼ inch water into bottom of the baking dish. Halved squash are baked uncovered at 350° F until tender, about 45 minutes. Cut squash should be covered with foil and baked until tender at 350° F 30 to 40 minutes.

Steaming: Steamed squash works well with cut pieces. Clean squash, peel, and cut into pieces. Place squash in a steamer basket. Place steamer basket over boiling water and steam until tender.

Highlighting Nutrition in Winter Squash:

Although each variety differs in its nutritional content, generally winter squash are a good source of vitamin A, potassium, and vitamin C.

Growing Winter Squash: “Summer and Winter Squash in the Garden,” by Dan Drost, contains tips and how-to for growing and can be found at: http://extension.usu.edu/files/publications/factsheet/HG_2004-09.pdf.

Preserving Winter Squash: Squash can be frozen or canned.

Freezing: Clean and cut squash, remove the seeds. To cook you can boil in water, steam or bake in an oven until soft. Remove the flesh from the rind and mash (spaghetti squash should be left stringy). Cool quickly. Place cooled, cooked squash in freezer containers leaving ½ inch head space, then seal,

Butternut Squash Fries

½ Butternut squash
Olive oil
Salt
Cooking spray

Preheat oven to 425°F. Peel the butternut squash with vegetable peeler or sharp knife. Remove seeds. Cut into uniform size French fries. Toss with a little bit of olive oil. Place on a baking sheet sprayed with non-stick spray, and cover lightly with salt. Bake for 40 minutes. Flip with a spatula halfway through baking. Fries are done when they start to brown on the edges about 30-40 minutes. Serve with ketchup or syrup if desired.

label, date, and freeze. Best if used within 8-12 months.

Canning: Go to National center for Home Preservation at <http://www.uga.edu/richfp/index.html>)

References:

1. “So Easy to Preserve” 5th ed. 2006. Cooperative Extension Service. The University of Georgia, Athen. <http://www.uga.edu/setp/>
2. National Center for Home Preservation <http://www.uga.edu/nchfp/index.html>
3. Food Stamp Nutrition Connection Recipe Finder. http://recipefinder.nal.usda.gov/index.php?mode+display&rec_id=30
4. USDA National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference, <http://www.nal.usda.gov/fnic/foodcomp/search>
5. CDC Vegetable of the Month, http://www.fruitsandveggiesmatter.gov/month/winter_squash.html

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Spaghetti Squash with Tomatoes and Herbs

1 medium spaghetti squash
2 cloves garlic, minced
2 tsp olive oil
1 can diced tomatoes, drained
1 tbsp chopped fresh basil (or 1 tsp dried basil)
1/8 tsp dried oregano
2-3 tbsp grated Parmesan cheese (or Romano cheese if you prefer)

Prepare and cook squash using either the microwave or baking methods above.

1. Sauté the minced garlic in the 2 tsp olive oil until it's softened and fragrant.
2. Add the tomatoes, basil, and oregano to the garlic and simmer for 10n to 15 minutes.
3. Spoon the garlic tomato mixture on top of squash strands.
4. Top with grated Parmesan or Romano cheese. Serves 4-6

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