

## WONDERFUL WINTER SQUASH

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One sure sign that Fall is near is the appearance of Winter squash at the farmers market. While it is available year-round in grocery stores, it peaks in availability from local farmers in October and November. The name reflects the fact that this type of squash keeps well so can be enjoyed long into the winter months. These very versatile vine or bush-ripened fruits come in many shapes and colors and are used in both sweet and savory recipes.

Winter squash is a powerhouse on the nutrition front - rich in antioxidants, particularly vitamins A and C, as well as B vitamins, Omega 3 fats, fiber, copper, manganese, and magnesium.

The origins of Winter squash have been traced to South America and Mexico, later making its way to North America. Interestingly, Winter squash's history shows it was an important staple in early South, Central, and North American cuisine along with corn and beans, and played a role in the practice of "companion planting" in farming.

"The corn and the beans made a complete protein, the squash supplied beta carotene, Omega 3's and Potassium. Whole communities could survive on these alone if game and other foods were scarce. They were also one of the first Companion Plantings, each contributing to the growth and well-being of the others. The corn supplied support for the beans to climb on and shade for the squash plants during the heat of the day. The squash plants large leaves shaded the ground, prevented weeds and deterred hungry wildlife that didn't like to walk through the fuzzy vines. The beans fixed nitrogen in the soil to feed the corn and the squash."

-- Melody Rose, *Dave's Garden*, January 2015

Currently in the United States, California, Michigan, Florida and Georgia are the largest producers of Winter squash, with large amounts also imported to the US from Mexico.

### SELECTION and STORAGE

When Winter squash is picked in late summer or early fall, it is "cured" in a sunny, dry place for 7 - 10 days to ensure it will keep for months without refrigeration.

#### Selection

Look for squash that -

- is free of nicks or cuts, soft spots or other damage
- has a deep matte color rather than shiny color which can signal it was picked too soon and not properly cured
- has a firm, dry, tan colored stem, not one that is soft or seeping sap
- feels heavy for its size indicating it has plenty of water inside

As a general rule for determining what size to buy for use in a recipe, each pound (1) of squash will yield approximately 2 cups peeled and diced.

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### Storage

Whole Winter squash should be stored outside of the refrigerator - on a counter, in a pantry or any cool area of the home - and will last anywhere from a couple of weeks up to several months depending on conditions. The best temperature for longer term store of whole squash is around 50° - 60° F. Butternut, Acorn and Hubbard varieties seem to have the longest shelf life. Those with thinner skins, such as Delicata or Spaghetti squash, have a shorter shelf life. Regularly check stored squash for signs of softening or decay.

Once cut, wrap any unused portions of squash tightly and refrigerate for up to one week.

### HOW TO USE

There are thousands of varieties of squash available, each with a slightly different look, texture and flavor, yet they are extremely versatile in their use in sweet and savory dishes. Choose squash with a firm texture for dishes where maintaining shape is important. Those with a soft texture work well for mashing or pureeing.

Here are seven easy-to-find varieties and a few ideas on preparation and use to get you started. Once you've tried these, see what other varieties you can find and creative ways to use them!

VARIETY	FLAVOR & TEXTURE	PREPARATION	USE
ACORN	mild to very sweet flavor  semi-dry texture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• grill</li><li>• bake</li><li>• roast</li><li>• steam</li><li>• saute</li><li>• stuff</li><li>• mash / puree</li></ul>	Works well: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• as a side dish or entrée</li><li>• added to vegetables or grains</li></ul>
BUTTERNUT	mid-range sweetness, slightly nutty flavor  smooth, firm texture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• bake</li><li>• steam</li><li>• roast</li><li>• saute</li><li>• mash or puree</li></ul>	Works well: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• in soup or stew</li><li>• in pie / baked goods</li><li>• as a side dish</li><li>• used in pasta filling</li><li>• spiralized</li></ul>
DELICATA	mild flavor  moist, creamy texture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• bake</li><li>• roast</li><li>• saute</li><li>• steam</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• no need to remove skins</li></ul>
HUBBARAD	very sweet, rich, pumpkin flavor  drier texture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• bake</li><li>• broil</li><li>• roast</li><li>• stuff</li><li>• mash</li></ul>	Works very well in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• pie and other baked goods</li><li>• pasta filling</li></ul>
KABOCHA	very sweet, slightly nutty flavor  drier texture, similar to sweet potato	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• roasted</li><li>• steamed</li><li>• saute</li><li>• stir-fry</li></ul>	Works well in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• soup, stew, curries</li><li>• salad</li><li>• pie</li><li>• pasta filling</li></ul>
SPAGHETTI	mild flavor, not sweet  tender, chewy texture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• baked</li><li>• roast</li><li>• steam</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• separate strands to use as "pasta"</li><li>• combine with vegetables</li></ul>
SWEET DUMPLING	very sweet flavor  tender, dry, starchy texture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• bake</li><li>• roast</li><li>• stuff</li></ul>	Works well: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• as a side dish or entrée</li><li>• added to vegetables or grains</li></ul>

### TIPS FOR CUTTING AND PEELING:

Cutting and peeling a raw Winter squash with their thick skins and odd shapes can be a challenge! Here are a few tips for making it safer and easier.

- Use a sharp, large chef's knife, not a slicing or paring knife. Sharp is key - it moves through the squash more efficiently and lessens the chance of slipping.
- Keep your cutting board from slipping by placing a damp cloth or silicone pad underneath.
- Trim the stem and bottom ends of the squash first to make flat sides. Place one of the flat sides on the cutting board for all further peeling and cutting.
- To peel - use a knife not a vegetable peeler. Run the knife just under the skin, cutting downward and away from you toward the cutting board.  
See ["How to Peel a Squash: An Easier Way"](#) from the Kitchn
- To cut into pieces - place the one of the flat sides (top or bottom end) on to the cutting board to stabilize the squash. After that, cut vertically, going downward through the squash.
- For cutting an Acorn squash in half for stuffing, see tips presented by The Kitchn - ["The Best Way to Cut an Acorn Squash in Half"](#)

For even easier cutting and peeling -

- Roast the whole squash in the oven - 400°F for about 15 - 20 minutes depending on size until only partially baked (just starting to soften but still very firm). Remove from oven, cool, then cut and peel as needed. Continue roasting to cook completely or use in desired recipe.

For a delicious Butternut Squash recipe, check out ["Roasted Squash Curry Bowl"](#) on the Love + Craft Kitchen blog.

