Harvest of the Month | Family Newsletter

Winter Squash



Winter squash includes dozens of varieties of squash that are in the gourd family. The most common varieties are acorn, butternut, delicata, spaghetti, buttercup, carnival and hubbard squashes, and pumpkin. Compared to summer squashes, winter squashes have a denser texture and flavor and thicker skin that allows for a longer storage life.

Did you know?

- Unlike summer squash which are picked when immature, winter squash are picked when fully ripe with fully developed seeds.
- All winter squash skin is technically edible but the texture of the thinner-skinned varieties, such as acorn and delicata squash, is more pleasant than thicker–skin ned varieties.
- Squashes are one of the oldest known crops – 10,000 years by some estimates.
- To make pie, Pilgrims hollowed out a pumpkin, filled it with apples, sugar, spices and milk, then put the stem back on and baked.

Selection

Look for squash that is heavy for its size and firm with no cracks. If you knock on the skin and it sounds hollow, it is ripe. If it sounds dull, the squash may either be unripe or spoiled.

Storage

Store squash in a cool, dry area but do not refrigerate. Although squash may last for several months, for best quality it is recommended that squash be stored no longer than a month.

Handling

Rinse winter squash under cold running water prior to cutting. If you want to remove the skin, you can do so using a vegetable peeler. Microwaving the squash first can make peeling easier. Using a knife, pierce the skin of the squash in several places. Microwave the squash for 3–4 minutes (or longer if a very large squash). This process helps to soften the skin and makes peeling easier.

Nutrition

The nutritional value of winter squash varies by variety. Most are good, if not excellent sources of vitamin C. Vitamin C is important in the body's healing process and may play a role in guarding against heart disease and cancer. Vitamin C also helps the body absorb iron. Many are also great sources of vitamin A including delicata, butternut, hubbard, carnival, and pumpkin. Vitamin A is important in eye health and immune function.

Harvest Season

According to the PA Preferred Seasonality Calendar, winter squash is in season in Pennsylvania from July through December.

Preparation

Roast: Slice squash in half, remove seeds and stringy material, and place cut–side up on baking sheet. Rub with oil and season with herbs and spices as desired. Flip the squash cut-side down and roast in a 400 F oven for 25–45 minutes (depending on the size) or until flesh is fork tender. Remove from oven and cool for 10 minutes before handling.

Microwave: Remove the skin from the squash and cut in half. Remove the seeds. Place on microwave–safe plate cut-side down and heat on high for 5–10 minutes depending on size, or until tender. Let stand for a few minutes before handling.

Boil: Remove the skin from the squash and cut in half. Remove the seeds and stringy material. Cut the squash into 1–inch chunks and place in a large saucepan. Add enough water to cover the squash. Bring to a gentle boil, cover, and simmer until the flesh is desired tenderness, about 10–15 minutes.

Steam: Follow the above directions for boiling but place squash in a steamer basket.

Stew: Remove the skin and seeds from the squash. Slice into uniform small chunks. Mix into soups, stews, or casseroles at the beginning of the cooking time.

Don't forget the seeds! The seeds that you scoop out of your winter squash can be a healthy and delicious snack. Separate Squash seeds from the pulp before baking. Lay them in a single layer on a cookie sheet and bake at 160 to 170 degrees, for about 15 to 20 minutes or until tender.

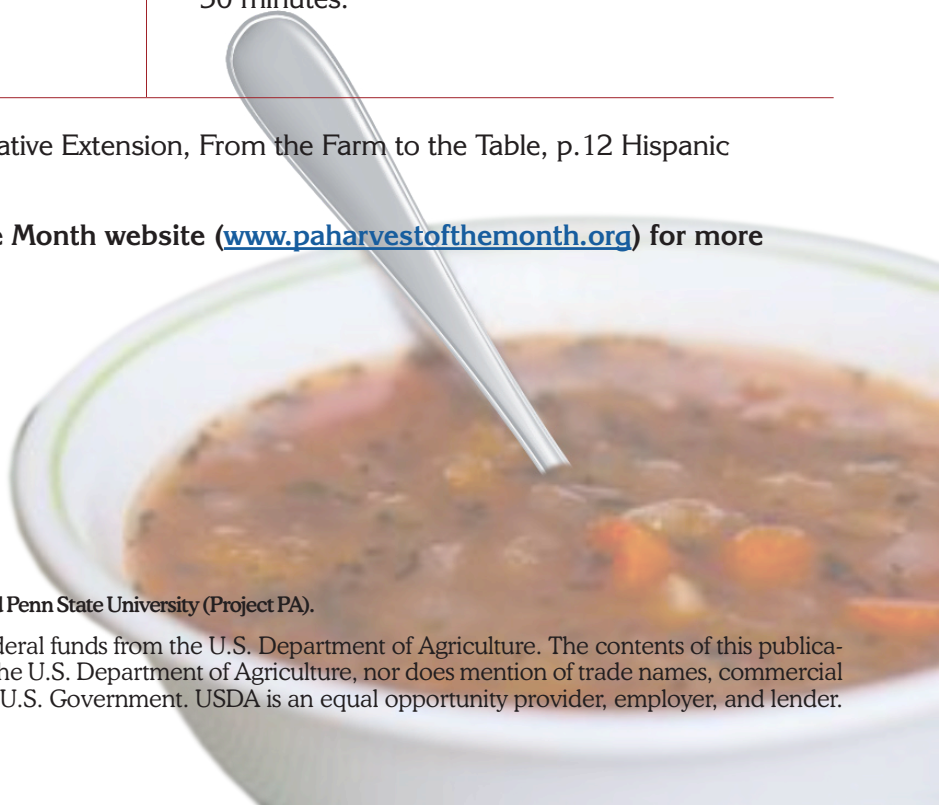
Recipe | Squash Soup

Makes Six (6) Servings.

Ingredients	Directions
1 tablespoon olive oil 2 onions (medium, chopped) 2 carrots (medium, chopped) 2 garlic cloves (minced) 1 cup tomato puree (canned) 5 cup chicken or vegetable broth, low-sodium 4 cup winter squash (cooked) 1 ½ tablespoon oregano (dried) 1 ½ tablespoon basil (dried)	1. In a large saucepan, warm oil over medium heat. 2. Stir in onions, carrots and garlic. 3. Cook for about 5 minutes, covered. 4. Stir in the tomato puree, chicken broth, cooked squash, and herbs. 5. Bring soup to a simmer and cook, covered, for 30 minutes.

Source: University of Connecticut, Cooperative Extension, From the Farm to the Table, p.12 Hispanic Health Council.

Check out the PA Harvest of the Month website (www.paharvestofthemonth.org) for more winter squash recipes.



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