

# Squash/Pumpkin

## I. What is Squash?

- A. In North America squash is grouped into summer squash and winter squash
- B. Summer squash means they are harvested as immature vegetables, which means they are harvested when their skin is still soft and the fruit is rather small. Summer squash are eaten almost immediately and require little to no cooking.
  - 1. Some common summer squash include zucchini, patty pan, and crookneck (show pictures as you talk about each type)
  - 2. Zucchini is a type of narrow squash that resembles a cucumber in size and shape. It has smooth, thin skin that is either green or yellow in color and can be striped or speckled. It has a creamy white flesh with numerous seeds. Zucchini can be grated and added when making bread. It is also cooked and used as a side dish.
  - 3. Patty pan are a small saucer-shaped squash featuring skin that can be either pale green or golden yellow in color. Its cream color flesh is denser and slightly sweeter than that of zucchini. Some people take the flesh out, roast it and mix with garlic for a savory snack.
  - 4. Crookneck generally has yellow skin (can have green) It has creamy white flesh. It is partially straight with a swan-like neck. Crookneck can be added to salads raw or can be grilled.
- C. Winter squash means they are harvested as mature vegetables.
  - 1. Despite their name, winter squash are a warm weather crop. They are generally harvested at the end of the summer, skin is harder, and they are usually stored in a cool place for eating later, which is where their actual name comes from because they can be stored through the winter.
  - 2. They generally require longer cooking times than summer squash.
  - 3. Winter squash comes in shapes round and elongated, scalloped and pear shaped with flesh that ranges from golden yellow to brilliant orange (show pictures as you talk about each type)
  - 4. Some common varieties of winter squash include butternut, Hubbard, ambercup, acorn, spaghetti squash, and pumpkin

5. Butternut squash are shaped like a regular pear with cream-colored skin, deep orange colored flesh and a sweet flavor somewhat like sweet potatoes. This squash is good for soups because it is not as stringy as other versions.
6. Hubbard squash are a larger sized squash that can be dark green, grey-blue, or orange red in color. This variety is slightly less sweet than other types. This squash is normally roasted, steamed, or added to pies.
7. Acorn squash has green skin with speckles of orange patches and a pale yellow-orange flesh. It is small and round shaped like that of an acorn, hence the name. This has a unique flavor that is a combination of sweet, nutty, and peppery. It is easy to slice into halves, put a little butter on, and bake for a tasty treat.
8. Spaghetti squash is oblong and ranges in color from ivory to yellow, orange, or green with white streaks. When cooked the flesh separates into strands resembling spaghetti pasta. It can actually be used to replace regular noodles in a dish.
9. Ambercup resembles a small pumpkin with orange skin. It has bright orange flesh and has a dry sweet taste. Peel it, cube the flesh, and roast it and serve like cut up potatoes.

D. Let's talk Pumpkin

1. Pumpkins generally weigh between 10 and 20 pounds, but can range from 1 to 1,000 pounds.
  2. The name pumpkin came from a Greek word "pepon" which means large melon.
  3. Most people use pumpkin for making pumpkin pie
  4. In addition to the fruit being eaten in squash, other parts of the plant are edible.
- E. The seeds of squash can be eaten directly, ground into paste, meal, "nut" butter, and even fine flour. The seeds can also be pressed for vegetable oil
- F. The shoots and leaves can be eaten as greens, cooked in omelets, or made into soup
- G. Most squash are similar in texture and flavor and the different varieties can be used in recipes interchangeably.

## **II. History of Squash/Pumpkin**

- A. Squash has been a staple for the Native Americans for more than 5000 years, and was a mainstay for Europeans who settled in America.
- B. Squash was one of the “three sisters” used by the Native Americans for agriculture. Beans and maize (corn) were the other two.
- C. All species of squash are native to North and South America. Most people say they originated in northern Argentina.
- D. Native Americans used woven pumpkin strips to make mats.
- E. The English word squash comes from askutasquash, which literally means raw or uncooked. This word comes from several words of the Native American language, and was named by people in Rhode Island. Despite this name, most people now cook their squash thoroughly.
- F. Pumpkins and other squash were at the first Thanksgiving feast between the Indians and Pilgrims in 1620

## **III. Health Benefits of Squash**

- A. Full of manganese, vitamin c, magnesium, vitamin a, dietary fiber, potassium, folate, calcium, etc
- B. Beneficial for your cardiovascular system
  - 1. Squash’s magnesium has been shown to be helpful for reducing the risk of heart attack and stroke. Together with potassium in squash, magnesium is also helpful in lowering blood pressure.
  - 2. Vitamin C and beta-carotene, a type of vitamin A, have been shown to prevent oxidized cholesterol from building up in the blood vessel walls.
  - 3. Folate, another B vitamin, has been shown to break down a dangerous byproduct caused by every day living that can contribute to heart disease and stroke if levels get too high.
  - 4. Squash’s high amounts of fiber has been shown to lower high cholesterol levels, which can help reduce the risk of heart disease. Fiber also helps to keep things moving in your digestive system.
- C. Beneficial at fighting cancer
  - 1. Vitamin C and beta-carotene work to get rid of free radicals, which can be dangerous byproducts of every day living, to decrease the risk of cancer.

2. High intake of fiber helps to keep cancer causing toxins away from cells in the colon to reduce the risk of cancer.
- D. Squash has anti-inflammatory properties
1. Vitamin C and beta carotene have properties to help fight asthma, osteoarthritis, and rheumatoid arthritis

#### **IV. Fun Facts**

- A. Squash is technically a fruit because it contains the plant's seeds, but it is treated as a vegetable.
- B. The peeling on squash is edible. Perhaps this is obvious with summer squash but you can eat the peeling on winter squash too.
- C. Squash belong to the plant family that contains cucumbers and melons
- D. Pumpkins were once recommended as a cure for freckles and snack bites.
- E. In early colonial times, pumpkin was used in the crust of pies, not as the filling.
- F. As we all know pumpkins are very much associated with Halloween, which dates back around 3000 years. First turnips were carved before pumpkins and then in the U.S. pumpkins were numerous so they were carved into Jack o' lanterns to protect against evil spirits or welcome deceased loved ones.
- G. The largest pumpkin pie ever made was over five feet in diameter and weighed over 350 pounds.
- H. 90-95% of the United State's pumpkins are grown in Illinois.
- I. The leading producer of all squash in the United States is Florida.
- J. The Northern Peru culture makes ceramics to represent earth, wind, and fire. Squash is represented frequently in their ceramics because it is an essential crop there.
- K. The winter varieties of squash produce more beta-carotene after storage than when the squash is fresh from the vine.
- L. George Washington, our first president, loved to grow squash.
- M. Christopher Columbus took squash to Europe from America.

## **V. How to Eat Squash**

- A. Cook and mash winter squash and add to soups, casseroles, pies, cakes, breads, muffins
- B. Serve roasted and mashed squash as a simple side dish
- C. Use summer squash raw in salads or with dips
- D. Grate raw summer squash and add to soups, casseroles, pies, cakes, breads, muffins
- E. Grated raw summer squash can be substituted for the carrots in carrot cake
- F. Try stir frying varieties of summer squash together to make a very colorful dish
- G. Marinate and grill summer squash
- H. Add sliced squash with dried tomatoes to rice when you cook it.
- I. If looking for a healthy, but fast alternative, go for canned pumpkin or squash without added salt

## **VI. Activity Ideas**

- A. Demonstrate how to make "spaghetti noodles" with spaghetti squash.
- B. Show samples of many varieties of squash, then give each person a squash label and have them come up and place the name next to the squash they think it is. Reveal the answers (number on label will match number on squash), and share a little information about some of the varieties shown. (see Tidbits About Squash Varieties)
- C. Cut and show flesh of different squash
- D. Make pumpkin pancakes
- E. Prepare Butternut Squash Soup
- F. Prepare any squash recipe of your choosing