

Winter Squash



Nutrition Notes by Jeannine

Many of us enjoy eating the traditional Thanksgiving meal with family members and friends. Let's explore some cooking tips and tricks to make cooking an easy experience, especially during this time of the year, starting with winter squash.

There are many types of winter squash, including pumpkin, spaghetti squash, acorn, and butternut. Squash can be a bit intimidating because the thickness of their skin. Just thinking about using a sharp knife to cut through its tough skin can be a scary thought! But don't steer your cart at the grocery store in the other direction. There is a solution. Let's explore some prepping ways to get the most out of this season's bountiful harvest.

How do you prepare squash? The first step is getting the squash ready, which involves the scariest part: cutting! How do we work around the risk involved in this step? Soften the skin of the squash first by washing the outside, using a sharp knife to poke a line of small slits in the skin where you plan to slice the squash in half, and then microwaving it for 5-6 minutes until slightly softened. Allow to cool before carefully sliding the knife through the small slits to cut completely in half with ease. That was not too bad after all.

Next, we must ask ourselves what we really want to do with the skin. Do we want to remove it before cooking, or leave the skin on? An easy option is to cook the squash with the skin on. Why complicate it. Just cut the squash half and remove the seeds. Place the squash halves, cut-side up, on a rimmed baking sheet. Rub with olive oil. Add salt and pepper. Flip the squash over and roast for 35-45 minutes or until the skin is blistered, browned, and the flesh is tender. It is easier to scoop out the center contents from the shell once it is cooked.

Looking for ways to eat squash? Get creative with the vitamin packed squash! Puree the flesh of any winter squash into a blender with $\frac{1}{4}$ cup of broth or milk (try almond milk without flavor added) and add it to soups. Ever want to make a festive warm beverage or latte? Add one of these puree ice cubes to steamed milk and add a scoop of instant espresso with a bit of pumpkin pie spice. You can even sweeten it up with a teaspoon of monk fruit sweetener.

Got dessert? Don't be shy, use roasted and pureed sweet kabocha and butternut squash for a delicious addition to classic desserts like basic pudding or mixed into softened vanilla ice cream. If you want to bake old fashioned pumpkin pies, try cooking your own whole pumpkin and scooping out the middle. You'll be left with a lovely decorative "pumpkin shell" to use as a serving dish for soups, desserts, and more.

So go ahead and pick a winter squash or two at the grocery store and get it ready for the Thanksgiving meal!

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Did you know?

- We use whole grain products whenever possible. Whole grains are abundant in fiber and B vitamins.
- The salt and pepper shakers indicate that a meal contains at least 1000 mg of sodium. We offer these meals only one or two times per month. The weekly average of sodium on the menu is less than or equal to 760 mg per meal.
- We offer a serving of fruit and vegetables each day to assure you eat food high in vitamins C, A and fiber.