

WINTER SQUASH

Spanish: calabaza de invierno **Russian:** sparzha (спаржа)

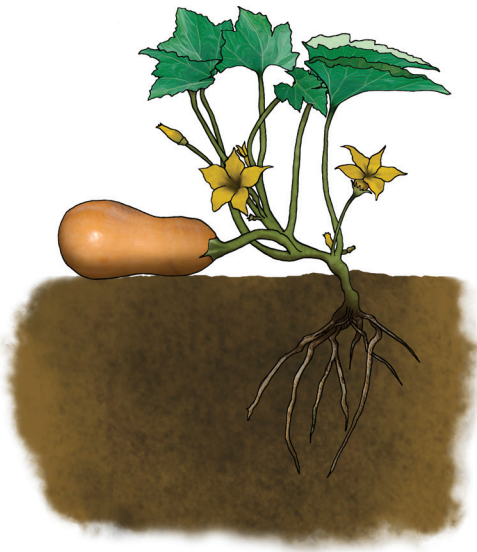
Squash was a favored food amongst Native Americans. According to Hopi tribes, squash blossoms (the flowers) represented fertility. Archeologists have found squash rinds and seeds in cliff dwellings that date back to 1500 B.C. Winter squash (e.g. pumpkin, acorn squash, and delicata) are different from summer squash (e.g. zucchini and patty pan). Winter squash are left to fully mature on the vine which allows for the development of seeds and a hard skin, while summer squash are eaten before reaching maturity. Winter squash is highly dependent on bees and other pollinators to pollinate the large flowers – watch for increased bee activity around the plant. Consider planting bright flowers nearby to attract pollinators.

FIND OUT MORE:

<http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/5000/pdf/5530.pdf>
<http://urbanext.illinois.edu/veggies/wsquash.cfm>



FROM SEED TO PLATE



Squash is an annual plant. A member of the gourd family, it is related to watermelon, cucumber, and muskmelon. Squash produce both male and female flowers on the same plant. Bees take pollen from the male flowers and transfer them to the female flowers to pollinate them in order to produce the fruit (the part we eat). The window for fertilization is 24 hours - amazingly small, especially when considering that each flower needs 8-10 visits from a pollinator for adequate pollination!

FIND OUT MORE:

<http://nwrec.hort.oregonstate.edu/pumpkin.html#cuc>
<http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/5000/pdf/5530.pdf>

IN THE GARDEN

Winter squash are fun to grow in the garden. You can plant them in the late spring/early summer and harvest them in the fall.



SUN: Full Sun



WATER: Regular water. Be sure to water if a dry spell occurs.



SOIL: Squash prefer light, well-drained soil that contains high levels of organic matter. Be sure to plant where squash and melons haven't been grown in the past.



SEEDS: Squash seeds are very sensitive to cold, plant only when the chance of frost has passed.



PLANT: Hill soil within a 1 square foot area to 6-12 inches in height. Plant 4-5 seeds, 1 inch deep in each hill.



SPACE: Depending on the variety, squash can take up a lot of space in the garden. Plant semi-vining or bush varieties in small garden spaces and allow for 6-8 ft between hills.



CARE: Be careful to minimize the amount of weeds around the plant until the vines provide ground cover.



HARVEST: Winter squash is ready to harvest when the skin has deepened in color and has formed a hard surface. Remove squash carefully from the vine leaving 2-3 inches of stem remaining and being careful not to bump or bruise the fruit unnecessarily.

STORAGE AND HANDLING

- Winter squash have hard, inedible skins. Delicata skins are edible when the squash are roasted.
- Choose firm squash that are heavy for their size.
- Don't be scared off by imperfections on the surface of the skin, but watch for soft spots.
- You can store whole winter squash in a cool, dry place for up to three months.

FIND OUT MORE:

<http://urbanext.illinois.edu/veggies/wsquash.cfm>

<http://nwrec.hort.oregonstate.edu/pumpkin.html#cuc>

IN THE KITCHEN

Winter squash comes in many shapes, sizes, and flavors. Enjoy it roasted whole, pureed for soups, or steamed. You can peel the thinner skinned varieties using a vegetable peeler. From there, cut the squash into the desired sized pieces to sauté to add to soups, or to puree for stuffing ravioli.

For harder varieties, use a sharp knife. Place the squash on a solid and stable surface with the stem on top. If it is an oblong shape, lay on the counter. Using care, cut the squash in half from the stem down. It can be helpful to place a towel between the squash and a cutting board, to keep the squash from moving. Put squash face down in a baking dish with an inch of water and put in the oven at 375 degrees for 40-60 minutes or until soft to the touch with a fork. Once finished, flip over with cut sides up. Scoop out the squash, drizzle with olive oil, salt and pepper, add butter and garlic powder, or for a nutritious sweet treat, add butter, maple syrup and cinnamon!

Try the classroom recipe at home, with this family-size version:

SPAGHETTI SQUASH WITH TOMATO SAUCE*

Serves 6

**Adapted from Yvonne Nickels in What's Cookin' II*

INGREDIENTS

- 1 spaghetti squash (2-2½ lbs.)
- ¼ cup chopped onion
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 Tbsp. vegetable oil
- 1 15 oz. can tomatoes, crushed
- 1 tsp. dried Italian seasoning (or a mix of dried basil and oregano)
- ¼ tsp. each: salt and pepper

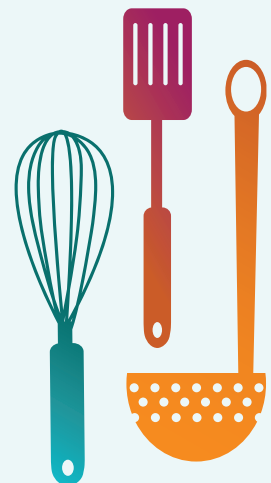
DIRECTIONS

1. Prepare sauce: Cook onion and garlic in hot oil until tender. Do not brown. Stir in tomatoes, Italian seasoning, salt and pepper. Bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer for 10-15 minutes, stirring often.
2. Cook squash: Squash can be boiled or roasted. Boil whole for 20-30 minutes until tender (test with a fork). Let squash cool slightly, then cut in half and scoop out seeds. OR, cut squash in half lengthwise and scoop out seeds. Prick skin with fork. Bake in a 350° oven for 30-40 minutes until tender.
3. Make "spaghetti": Scrape squash from shells. Use a fork to shred squash. Serve tomato sauce over squash.

FOR MORE PREPARATION TIPS:

<http://ohioline.osu.edu/hyg-fact/5000/pdf/5530.pdf>

http://www.harvestofthemonth.cdph.ca.gov/download/Fall/21712/Ed_News_Winter%20Squash.pdf



FAMILY CONNECTIONS

The family newsletter for winter squash can be sent home at the beginning of the month. The newsletter is available in English, Spanish, and Russian. Print the first page only, or add photos and stories to the second page and print both sides for families.



GET PARENTS' ATTENTION!

- Attach the newsletter to the child by attaching a string of yarn to the paper and making a newsletter “necklace” or pinning the newsletter to an article of clothing.
- Attach the newsletter to a drawing or other piece of artwork created by the child
- Get a set of “Ask me about ____” stickers or nametags, or use blank nametag stickers to draw attention to the fruit or vegetable of the month. Send each child home with an “Ask me about winter squash!” sticker for the winter squash month.
- Offer tastes of the recipe of the month at a parent meeting, or when parents pick up their children from your site.

WINTER SQUASH VARIETIES



Butternut • Delicata • Kabocha • Pumpkin • Spaghetti



ABOUT HARVEST FOR HEALTHY KIDS

Harvest for Healthy Kids is a nutrition program designed to introduce children to a wide variety of fruits and vegetables through their meals and snacks and classroom activities. Monthly family newsletters engage families as partners in helping children to develop healthy eating habits. Harvest for Healthy Kids is a partnership between Mt. Hood Community College Head Start and the School of Community Health at Portland State University.