

Winter Squash

Nutrition and Health

Winter squash provides vitamins A and C and niacin. One ½-cup serving is only 65 calories.

Selection

In selecting winter squash, remember that a hard, tough rind indicates full maturity. Select squash that is heavy for its size. Slight variation in skin color does not influence flavor. Avoid squash with cuts, punctures and sunken or moldy spots on the rind as they indicate decay. A tender rind is a sign of immaturity and means poor eating quality in winter squash.

Varieties of winter squash include acorn, Hubbard, buttercup, spaghetti, kabocha and pumpkin.

Storage

Store whole winter squash in a cool, dry, well-ventilated place. A temperature of 45° to 50°F is best. For storage up to several months, be sure squash is fully mature (has a hard shell) with the stem attached. Don't store bruised or damaged squash for long periods of time since they spoil quickly. If you have a number of them, they should be cured for 10 days at 80° to 85°F to harden the rinds and heal surface cuts for longer storage.

Preparation

To bake, cut into halves or serving pieces. Remove seeds and stringy parts. Place cut side down in a shallow baking dish. Add a small amount of water (about ¼ inch). Cook until almost tender, about 30 to 40 minutes at 400°F. Add more hot water if necessary. Turn pieces of cooked squash cut side up. Sprinkle with salad dressing, add seasonings and/or fill and continue baking until tender, about 20 to 25 minutes, depending on the size of pieces.

The skin is very hard, so it is better to cook whole until the skin softens. In a pressure pan, steam 5 to 10 minutes; in boiling water, cook 20 to 30 minutes. Drain, pare and mash. Season with butter, salt, pepper and a trace of sugar.

Recipes

Use your imagination and give squash that "distinctive flavor" your family likes. Try the following ideas, breaking the flesh with a fork when you add the seasonings.

- Sprinkle with salt (pepper optional).
- Add ham, bacon or sausage drippings; butter or margarine.
- Sprinkle on a mixture of cinnamon, allspice, butter, honey, raisins and/or nuts.
- Add marshmallows (miniature or cut up) and cranberry sauce with a dash of nutmeg in baked shells during the last 20 minutes of cooking.
- Mash with cream and nutmeg or candied ginger, or orange juice and grated orange rind.
- Fry sausage patties until three-fourths done and then place in each baked squash half. Continue baking until tender.
- Try placing a small onion, brushed with butter, under each squash half and bake. When tender, turn cut side of squash up. Mash slightly with fork, place onion in center and surround with cooked link sausage. Brush with butter, sprinkle with paprika and bake 10 more minutes.
- Try scalloped squash. Peel and slice squash. Place in greased baking dish in alternate layers with tart apple slices. Top with soft, buttered bread crumbs. Bake at 375°F until tender (about 45 minutes).

Sauteed Winter Squash

⅓ cup golden raisins
½ cup hot water
2 teaspoon olive oil
1 medium red onion, cut into ½ inch chunks
3 cloves garlic, slivered
1½ pounds squash peeled and cut into 1-inch chunks
¼ cup dry white wine
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar
1 tablespoon sugar

In a small bowl, combine the raisins and hot water, set aside to soften.

In a large nonstick skillet, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the onion and garlic and cook, stirring frequently, until the onion has colored, about 7 minutes.

Add the squash and cook, stirring often, until the squash begins to color, about 5 minutes.

Add the raisins and their soaking liquid, the wine, vinegar and sugar. Bring to a simmer, cover, and cook until the vegetables are tender, about 10 minutes.

Pumpkin Waffles

2½ cups all-purpose flour
⅓ cup packed brown sugar
2¼ teaspoons baking powder
1 teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon salt
2 teaspoons ground cinnamon
1 teaspoon ground ginger
¼ teaspoon ground cloves
4 large eggs, separated
2 cups well-shaken buttermilk
1 cup canned solid-pack pumpkin or pumpkin puree
6 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted

Preheat oven to 250°F and preheat waffle iron.

Sift together flour, brown sugar, baking powder, soda, salt and spices. Whisk egg yolks in a large bowl with buttermilk, pumpkin and butter until smooth.

Whisk in dry ingredients just until combined.

In a mixing bowl with a whisk attachment, whisk the egg whites until they hold soft peaks. Fold them gently into the waffle batter, until just combined.

Brush waffle iron lightly with oil and spoon batter (about 2 cups for four 4-inch Belgian waffles) into waffle iron, spreading quickly. Cook.

Transfer waffles to oven to keep warm and crisp.

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