

## HARVEST for HEALTH



### It's WINTER SQUASH!

#### Winter Squash Facts

- Wild winter squash was originally found in the area between Guatemala and Mexico. At that time it was cultivated for the seeds because the fruit had little flesh and was very bitter.
- Winter squash comes in all kinds of shapes – round, elongated, scalloped or pear-shaped with flesh that ranges from golden-yellow to brilliant orange.
- Although they are from the same family, summer and winter squashes are quite different. Summer squashes are soft-skinned and all parts, at any stage, can be eaten – from blossom, to small, immature fruit, to fully mature. Winter squashes are only eaten when mature and cooked. In general, they have hard shells (rinds), with thick, inedible skin and a hollow seed cavity with fully developed seeds. The thick rind allows winter squash to be stored much longer than summer squash.
- The plants generally take three months or more of growing time to fully mature. Harvest time is when the cool weather of fall sets in.

#### Did You Know?

The Native Americans believed squash seeds increased fertility and called squash “the apple of God.” They held it in such high regard that squash was often buried along with their dead to provide them nourishment on their final journey.

#### Nutritional Value

Winter squash is an excellent source of vitamin A. It is also a very good source of vitamin C, potassium, dietary fiber, and manganese, and a good source of folate, omega-3 fatty acids, thiamin, copper, vitamin B5, vitamin B6, niacin and copper.

#### Selection

Choose winter squash that has a smooth, dry, dull rind, free of cracks or soft spots. Shiny or easily nicked skin means the squash did not reach maturity. Look for squash with a deep color and one that feels heavy for its size. A firm, rounded, dry stem keeps bacteria from entering. Some of the most popular varieties are:

- **Butternut** – *Shaped like a large pear. Cream-colored skin, deep orange flesh, sweet flavor.*
- **Hubbard** – *Large dark green, grey-blue or orange-red in color.*
- **Turban or Buttercup** – *Green with speckles or stripes. Orange-yellow flesh and taste reminiscent of hazelnuts.*
- **Kabocha** (*Japanese varieties, such as Delicata*) – *Richer, sweeter and creamier than other varieties of winter squash. Skin gets soft when cooked and can be eaten.*
- **Spaghetti** – *Thin yellow hard rind. When cooked, inside is similar to strands of spaghetti.*



#### Storage

Winter squash can be stored up to 3 months or longer in a cool, dry place between 55 and 60 degrees. Cut pieces of squash should be tightly wrapped and stored in the refrigerator.

#### How to Prepare

To roast: Rinse the squash before cutting. Cut squash in half, remove the seeds. Pierce the outside a few times with a fork. Place cut side down in a baking dish and bake at 350 - 375 degrees for 45 – 60 minutes, until fork tender, then carefully scoop out the interior flesh.

To microwave: Prepare as above, only place in a covered dish with a few spoonfuls of water and microwave on high for 7-10 minutes per pound. Let stand a few minutes to finish cooking.

Note on peeling: If your recipe calls for uncooked, cubed squash, it is easier to peel if the skin is softened. Wash the squash, then pierce it in several places with a fork. Microwave on high for 45-60 seconds, just long enough to slightly steam the skin without actually cooking the flesh. Cut in half or quarters, then peel with a potato peeler or sharp knife.



### Add More Winter Squash to Your Life

- Season winter squash with sweet, fruity and spicy flavors, such as maple syrup or brown sugar, diced apples or shredded orange peel, cinnamon or ginger. Or try the savory route. Use herbs such as rosemary, sage, thyme or oregano, or experiment with chili peppers and feta cheese.
- Try cooked spaghetti squash with your favorite pasta sauce. Or top with mushrooms, onions and garlic that have been sautéed in olive oil. Spaghetti squash can be used in place of pasta in just about any dish.
- Cooked, pureed squash can be frozen for use later as a side dish, or used to thicken, color, or flavor soups, sauces or stews.
- Add peeled squash chunks to stir-fry, soups, or pastas.
- Mash cooked squash with garlic, a little olive oil and spices to use as a substitute for mashed white potatoes – or mix with sweet potatoes.
- Don't feel like cooking much? You can find pureed squash in the canned or frozen food section in the grocery store. And don't forget the old standby – pumpkin!

### Pumpkin Ginger Smoothie

- 1 large banana, peeled and frozen
- 2/3 c. plain low-fat yogurt
- 1/2 c. orange juice
- 2 tsp. minced fresh ginger
- 1/2 c. canned pumpkin

Slice the banana into 1/2" chunks. Combine all ingredients in a blender until smooth. Makes two 10 oz. drinks.

### Curried Squash & Chicken Soup

- 1 - 10 oz. package frozen pureed winter squash
- 1/2 c. "lite" coconut milk
- 1/2 c. water
- 8 oz. boneless, skinless chicken breast, thinly sliced
- 1 - 6 oz. bag baby spinach
- 2 tsp. lime juice
- 2 tsp. brown sugar
- 1/2 to 1 tsp. Thai red curry paste (*found in the Asian section of the grocery store—it's a combination of chili peppers, garlic, lemongrass and a ginger-type root*)
- 1/4 tsp. salt

Heat squash, coconut milk and water in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the squash defrosts, about 10 minutes. Add chicken, reduce heat to medium and simmer, stirring occasionally for 3 minutes. Add spinach, lime juice, brown sugar and continue cooking until the chicken is thoroughly cooked, about 3 minutes. Add curry paste to taste (go easy at first). You may substitute tofu for the chicken, add more veggies or cooked brown rice for a heartier meal. Serves 2, 1-3/4 cup each. 274 calories; 7 g fat (4 g sat, 1 g mono); 63 mg cholesterol; 28 g carbohydrate; 27 g protein; 8 g fiber; 521 mg sodium; 1,288 mg potassium. Recipe from [www.eatingwell.com](http://www.eatingwell.com)

### Resources

Remember to look for low-fat recipes, or substitute high-fat ingredients with low-fat options.

#### Winter Squash Recipes & Tips

- [www.cookinglight.com](http://www.cookinglight.com)
- [www.allrecipes.com](http://www.allrecipes.com)
- [www.eatingwell.com](http://www.eatingwell.com)
- [www.whfoods.com](http://www.whfoods.com)

#### Cancer/Nutrition Websites

- [www.cancerproject.org](http://www.cancerproject.org)
- [www.aicr.org](http://www.aicr.org)
- [www.cancer.net](http://www.cancer.net)

**Harvest for Health and DEFEAT Cancer** are programs of **St. Charles Cancer Treatment Center**. DEFEAT Cancer is sponsored by the **Lance Armstrong Foundation** and supported by **Advanced Specialty Care**.

[www.bendcancer.org](http://www.bendcancer.org) & [www.defeatcancer.info](http://www.defeatcancer.info)

We also thank **St. Charles Food Services – Cafeteria & Deli** for their assistance and support.

