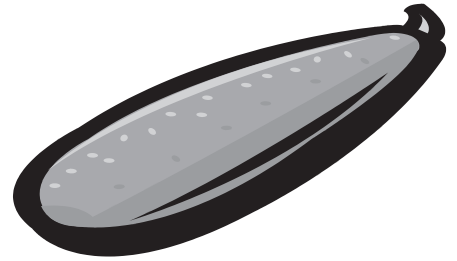


Summer Squash

Cucurbita

Why do folks in Lake Woebegone lock their cars during the summer? To prevent their neighbors from leaving bags of zucchini in the car.

Garrison Keillor
National Public Radio, "Prairie Home Companion"



Nutrition:

Being about 95% water, summer squash is low in calories, but provides only a moderate amount of nutrients, including potassium, a modest amount of vitamins A and C, plus a few trace minerals. Summer squash also contains two phytochemicals, coumarins and flavonoids, plus some beta-carotene. To get the full benefit of the nutrients in summer squash, the skins must be eaten, as the pulp has few nutrients by itself. (1,2,5)

Varieties:

The most common types of summer squash include: zucchini, yellow crookneck, yellow straightneck and patty pan. Summer squashes are mild in taste and are similar enough to one another that you can usually use them interchangeably in recipes calling for summer squash of one kind or another.

Patty Pan squash is pale yellow to greenish-white in color. It is a round, flattish squash with scalloped edges, and is good for cooking and stuffing. **Yellow Crookneck** and **Yellow Straightneck** squashes are longer, bright yellow squashes that are very similar, except for their shape. Yellow Crookneck has a slender neck that curves and turns into a bulbous shape at the end, whereas the Straightneck is long and cylindrical, more like the shape of a dark green **Zucchini**. Yellow squash and zucchini are good when eaten raw or cooked. (1,5)

Storage:

Summer squash can be stored for up to one week, when stored unwashed in perforated plastic bags in the crisper drawer of the refrigerator. (1,5)

Preparation:

Wash squash and trim the ends before preparing. In general, summer squash does not need to be peeled or seeded, the exception being oversized squash that has thick skin and large seeds - such as "baseball bat" zucchini! Summer squash can be cut into julienne strips, diced, cut into whole or half-moon slices, and grated. Oversized squash can be cut into half lengthwise, the seeds scooped out, and the center stuffed for baking. Likewise, patty pan squash can be prepared for stuffing by slicing off a "lid" at the stem end, then scooping out the seeds and a bit of the flesh to make a hollow for stuffing. (5)

Cooking Methods:

Summer squash is mostly water and it releases a lot of water as it cooks. It cooks rapidly and turns mushy if overcooked. To prevent a dish from getting too watery, sprinkle salt over the cut edges of the prepared squash and allow to stand for 30 minutes in a colander. One-half teaspoon of salt is sufficient to salt a pound of summer squash. Rinse the squash and pat dry before proceeding with your recipe.

There are a variety of ways to cook squash:

Bake: Summer squash can be baked whole, halved or sliced. Place squash in a baking dish and add a few tablespoons of liquid (water, stock, tomato juice) to the bottom of the pan. Cover the dish and bake in a 350 degree oven for 30 to 35 minutes, or until tender. To shorten the bake time, blanch squash for 5 to 10 minutes before baking.

Boil: This method is best when saved for over-sized squash. Place the whole or halved squash into boiling water. Cooking time: 10 to 15 minutes for whole squash, 5 minutes for halved squash.

Sauté: Sauté sliced, cubed or grated squash in stock or a combination of stock and a bit of oil. Cooking time: 3 to 6 minutes.

Steam: Steam summer squash whole, diced or sliced in a vegetable steamer basket. Cooking time: 10 to 12 minutes for whole squash, 3 to 5 minutes for sliced or diced squash.

Stir-fry: Stir-fry summer squash alone or along with other mild flavored vegetables, such as green beans, mushrooms, corn, and mild peppers or onions. Cooking time: 4 to 5 minutes.

(3,5,23)

Tips and Suggestions:

- * **Flavor baked squash** by baking it along with sliced onions, minced garlic and herbs.
- * Try baking squash halves that have been sprinkled with **herbed breadcrumbs** and/or **grated cheese**. Bake uncovered and place under the broiler briefly to brown off the top when done.
- * Cook several varieties of summer squash together for a **colorful side dish**.
- * **Herbs** that go well with summer squash include: dill, chili powder, lemon pepper, basil and thyme.
- * Add sliced summer squash to **vegetable stir-fries**.
- * Sprinkle sliced, diced or grated summer squash over **fresh green salads**.
- * **Grill** marinated summer squash halves.
- * Add sliced summer squash to **vegetable trays**.
- * Use grated summer squash as a **substitute for grated carrot** in carrot cake or muffins.
- * Add sliced summer squash and dried tomatoes to **rice** as it cooks.

(1,3,23)

Yields:

1 pound fresh =

4 cups sliced, diced or julienne-sliced
3½ cups grated (after salting, this becomes 1¾ cups)

Joy of Gardening Cookbook