

# Winter Squash



Acorn Squash



Spaghetti Squash



Butternut Squash



Carnival Squash

## Did You Know

- Winter squash are harvested in the fall and can last into the winter if stored correctly.
- The skins are hard and usually not eaten, quite different from their summer squash cousins, such as zucchini.
- Gourds, cucumbers, and melons are all part of the Cucurbit family, but all have different origins. Squash and pumpkins are native to the Americas, while cucumbers originated in eastern Asia and melons in Africa or Persia.
- Squash is one of the oldest cultivated crops in the Western Hemisphere and was originally grown for its seeds. Seeds found in Mexico have been dated as 10,000 years old.
- To some Native American tribes, corn, beans, and squash are known as the "Three Sisters." These plants were grown together and were staples of many tribes in North America.

## Gardening

To grow winter squash you need considerable garden space and full sun. Start seedlings indoors 3-4 weeks prior to planned planting date. Plant hardened off seedlings outdoors one week before last frost or plant seeds directly in garden. Winter squash may be grown in larger containers, but the vines and squash may need to be trellised or supported as they grow outside of the container. Vines will begin to die off as the squash reaches harvest time.

## Selection

Select winter squash that are firm, have dull-colored skin, and feel heavy for the size.

Squash with cracks or brown or soft spots should be avoided. Part of the stem should be intact for optimal storage.

## Storage

Winter squash can be stored from 1 week to 6 months depending on the variety and storage conditions. Store winter squash in a dark area, with good ventilation, between 50-60°F for ideal storage conditions. Remove soil prior to storage and leave stem on. Once the squash is cut, wrap and store in the refrigerator for 1-2 days.

## Cooking

**Bake.** Peel and cube or slice squash in half and scoop out seeds. On a foil-lined baking dish, place halved squash cut-side down or evenly arrange cubed squash. Cover and bake whole squash at 350°F for 45 minutes or until tender. Bake cubed squash at 350°F for 20-25 minutes.

**Boil or Steam.** Keep whole or cut squash into quarters or cubes and remove the skin and seeds. To boil squash whole, pierce skin with fork, cover, and boil for 1 hour. To steam or boil cubed squash, place slices into pan of boiling water or steam basket for 10-15 minutes or until tender.

**Microwave.** Peel and cube squash or slice squash in half and remove seeds. Place cubes or halves in a microwave-safe dish with 2-3 tablespoons water. Microwave on high for 5-8 minutes for cubes or 8-12 minutes for halves. To soften thick or hard rinds before cutting or peeling, poke holes in rind with fork, and microwave for 2-5 minutes. Remove from microwave, and allow to rest for 1-2 minutes until cool enough to handle.

**Preserve.** For more information on preserving winter squash, read MontGuides Home-canning Pressures and Processing Times and Freezing Vegetables. Visit <https://nutrition.msuextension.org/> and click on the food preservation link or contact your Extension office to find the guide.

**Puree.** Roast or bake squash. Scoop squash from skin and puree squash to a smooth consistency. It can be added to soup, breads, muffins, or custards.

**Roast.** Peel and cube squash. Place on baking sheet and drizzle with olive oil and low-sodium seasoning. Bake at 350°F for 45 minutes or until tender.

**Roast Seeds.** Remove seeds and rinse thoroughly to remove strings or parts of the squash. Drizzle with olive oil and low-sodium seasoning before placing evenly on a baking sheet. Cook at 300°F for 10-15 minutes. Stir periodically for even roasting.

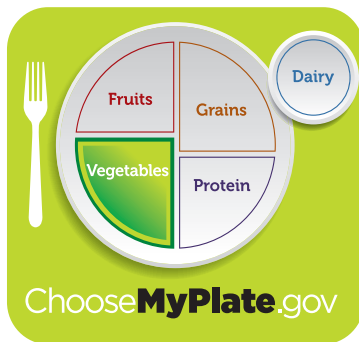
**Sauté.** Peel and grate or cube squash. Heat pan to high, add butter or oil to coat bottom of pan and add squash. Sauté 15-25 minutes, or until tender.

**Season.** To enhance flavor, season with allspice, basil, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, marjoram, or nutmeg.

*Adapted from the Winter Squash Food Fact Sheet developed by Montana State University Extension. For the full fact sheet and other resources, visit: <https://nutrition.msuextension.org/>.*

## Nutrition Information

Winter squash are loaded with vitamins A and C and provide approximately the same amount of potassium as bananas! Winter squash is also a source of vitamin B<sub>6</sub>, magnesium, iron, and calcium. Beta-carotene which is found in many orange colored vegetables, including winter squash, turns into vitamin A. Vitamin A helps maintain good vision and keeps skin healthy.



## Recipes

### Winter Squash and Kale Quesadillas

These are a delicious meal, easy for lunch or dinner, and can contain ground beef or shredded chicken for additional protein.

*Developed by: Jessica Manly FoodCorps Service Member*

#### Servings

6

#### Ingredients

- 1/2 whole winter squash, peeled, seeded, and diced
- 2 1/2 Tbsp canola oil
- 1/4 tsp kosher salt
- Black pepper, to taste
- 1/4 tsp chili powder, more to taste
- 3/4 bunch kale, leaves torn, stalks discarded
- 6 flour or corn tortillas, small fajita sized, flour tortillas are sturdier
- 1 Tbsp Butter for pan
- 1 1/2 cups Monterey Jack or Cheddar Cheese, grated
- Salsa, avocado, hot sauce, or other toppings for servings

#### Preparation

1. Heat oil in a large skillet over high heat..
2. Add squash and sprinkle with salt, pepper, and chili powder. Cook for several minutes, turning gently with a spatula, until squash is deep golden brown and tender (but not falling apart). Move to a plate and set aside.
3. In the same skillet, heat butter or oil over medium-high heat and add in the kale. Toss it around with tongs and cook it for 3-4 minutes. Add in the cooked squash and gently toss together. Set aside.
4. In a separate skillet, heat oil or butter and lightly brown both sides of the 8 tortillas. Build the quesadillas one by one by adding a layer of cheese topped with a layer of the squash/kale mixture on half of the tortilla and then folding it over.
5. When the cheese is melted, flip to the other side for a minute or two and then remove from the skillet, and cut in half or thirds. Serve with salsa, avocado...or any sides you'd like!

## Simply Delicious Roasted Butternut Squash

Get creative with the seasonings in this recipe to match your meal. Try cumin and mild chili powder for Mexican flavor, or drizzle with maple syrup for a fall treat.

*Developed by: Emma Fernandez, FoodCorps Service Member*

### Servings

6 (depending on size of squash)

### Ingredients

1 Butternut squash - peeled, seeded, and cut into cubes

*Can substitute any type of winter squash for butternut including acorn, buttercup, carnival.*

2 Tbsp olive oil

2 cloves garlic, minced

Salt and ground black pepper to taste

Optional: drizzle with honey, or sprinkle with dried rosemary, or create your own flavor combination

### Preparation

1. Preheat oven to 400°F.
2. Toss butternut squash with olive oil and garlic in a large bowl. Season with salt and black pepper (and honey and rosemary or other seasons if using). Arrange coated squash on a baking sheet.
3. Roast in the preheated oven until squash is tender and lightly browned, stirring once, 25-30 minutes.

## Activities

### Squashy Sensory Exploration

*Adapted from: Vital Communities and Vermont Harvest of the Month*

### Montana Early Learning Standards

2.3–Sensorimotor

3.6–Print Development

4.4–Reflection and Interpretation

4.5–Reasoning and Representational Thought

4.11–Measurement

4.15–Scientific Thinking

### Description

Children will use their senses to learn about winter squash. They will practice scientific drawing and will taste raw and cooked winter squash.

### Supplies

- Several varieties of squash
- Vegetable peeler
- Baking sheet
- Olive oil, salt, and pepper
- Tasting spoons (one or two for each student)
- Student notebooks or paper, writing utensils.

### Directions

1. Prior to the lesson, set up four stations at which children will explore squash using their five senses. Recommended stations: 1. Whole squash of different varieties for children to draw and observe; 2. A variety of raw squash cut in half with seeds exposed for children to feel, smell and diagram; 3. Roasted squash seeds for children to taste and describe; 4. Roasted squash and raw squash chunks for children to taste test.
2. Have children rotate through each station in small groups. Encourage children to draw pictures that show how they experience squash with their senses; ask guiding questions to help with this process.
3. After children rotate through the stations, meet as a whole group to share observations, surprising finds, things children learned and their drawings. Record vocabulary generated at the stations, focusing on descriptive and positive words that describe healthy foods (crunchy, yellow etc.).
4. With extra time, use the recorded vocabulary to create a class poem about winter squash!
5. Consider a math extension by having children measure the circumference of multiple squash. Also, ask children to guess how many seeds are inside, charting their responses. Cut the squash open, count the seeds, and determine whose guess was closest.

## Extend the Fun

### Squash Discovery Lab

Adapted from [www.farmtopreschool.org/documents/F2P%20Curriculum.pdf](http://www.farmtopreschool.org/documents/F2P%20Curriculum.pdf).

Set up an exploration table with a green pumpkin (with a small patch of orange on it), two small pumpkins, one large pumpkin and an assortment of gourds. Encourage the children to sort by color, shape, and texture (smooth and bumpy). Ask the children to lightly tap each pumpkin to listen for different sounds. Provide measuring tools such as rulers, a scale, and measuring tape and demonstrate how to record the size of each pumpkin.

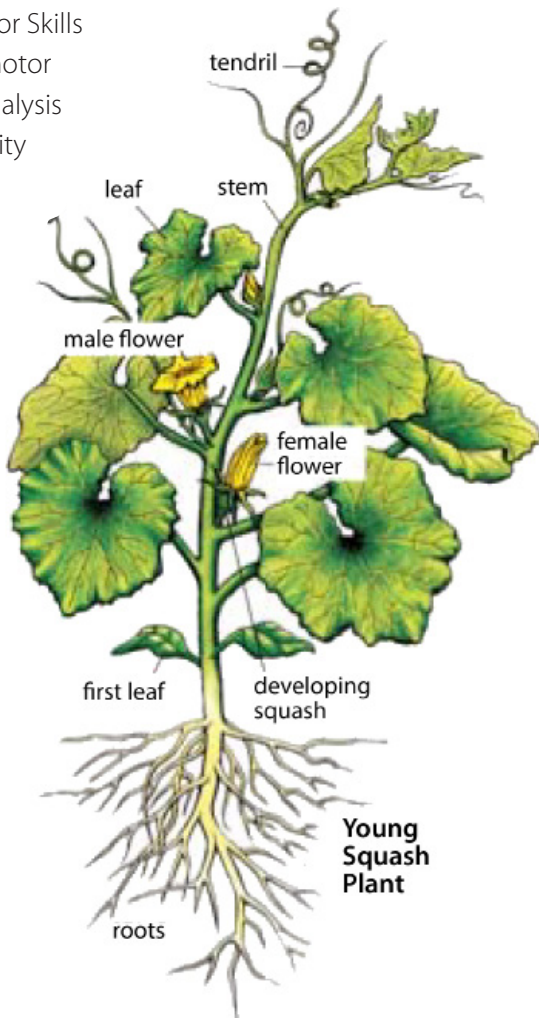
MELS

2.2–Fine Motor Skills

2.3–Sensorimotor

4.12–Data Analysis

4.1–Curiosity



### Do Squash Float?

Source: *California Farm to Preschool*

Fill a large bucket with water. Ask children to place various squash into the water. Ask questions such as: Does the squash float or sink? How does the squash move in the water? Does it tip on its side? Does it point downward or bobble on top?

MELS 4.5-Reasoning and Representational Thought

### Pumpkin Trees Song and Fingerplay

Source: *California Farm to Preschool*

It's harvest time and what do I see?

(Put hand to forehead, look around)

Pumpkins! Pumpkins in a tree!

(Point upward)

In a tree? That can't be!

(Place hands on cheeks.)

Where, oh where, should pumpkins be?

(Throw hands outward)

On the ground? Yes, on the ground!

(Point to ground)

That's where pumpkins should be found!

(Place hands on hips)

MELS 4.6-Creative Movement



### Book Nook

*The Little Squash Seed*, by Gayla Scale

*Pumpkin Pumpkin*, by Jeanne Titherington

*Sophie's Squash*, by Pat Zietlow

*Too Many Pumpkins*, by Linda White

*How Many Seeds in a Pumpkin*, by Brian Karas

### Dig Deeper

For sources and photo credits along with more recipes, lessons, quick activities, resources, and guides, visit:

[mtharvestofthemonth.org](http://mtharvestofthemonth.org).

## 4 Montana Harvest of the Month: Winter Squash



The Montana Harvest of the Month program showcases Montana grown foods in Montana communities. This program is a collaboration between Montana Farm to School, Office of Public Instruction, Montana Team Nutrition Program, National Center for Appropriate Technology, Montana State University Extension, Gallatin Valley Farm to School, FoodCorps Montana, and Montana Department of Agriculture. More information and resources are available at: [mtharvestofthemonth.org](http://mtharvestofthemonth.org).

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