

# All About Winter Squash

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## Winter Squash



**Squash:** The fruits of various members of the gourd family, which fall into two classifications, summer squash and winter squash.

**Winter Squash** have thick skin, a hollow cavity containing hard seeds, and very dense flesh requiring that it be cooked longer than summer squash. Their skin is not edible and they must be cooked before they are eaten. They are picked when they are fully ripe, unlike summer squash that is picked before it is fully ripe. Winter squash is drier and has a sweeter taste than summer squash. Their skin is hard and must be removed before the squash is eaten. It is low in sodium, a good source of vitamin A, and high in fiber. Examples of winter squash are butternut, buttercup, turban, acorn, and spaghetti.

### **Uses:**

Winter squash is often cooked and eaten on its own with simply salt and butter added. They also go well with other seasonings, such as cinnamon, ginger, cloves, and allspice. Some winter squashes are sweetened by adding brown sugar, maple syrup, and honey. They are added to soups, stews, curries, casseroles, and other dishes. They can be mixed with other vegetables and be used to replace sweet potatoes in most recipes. They are also used in pies, muffins, cakes, puddings, and other desserts.

### **How to Buy:**

Select squash that have dull-colored skin, a firm shell, and is heavy for its size. Smooth, shiny skin is an indication that the squash is not ripe. Avoid squash with damaged spots or that are cracked. If purchasing a cut piece, select squash with darker flesh, which is an indication that it is riper.

### **At Their Best:**

Winter squashes are available all year round but their peak season is early fall to early winter.





### **Storage:**

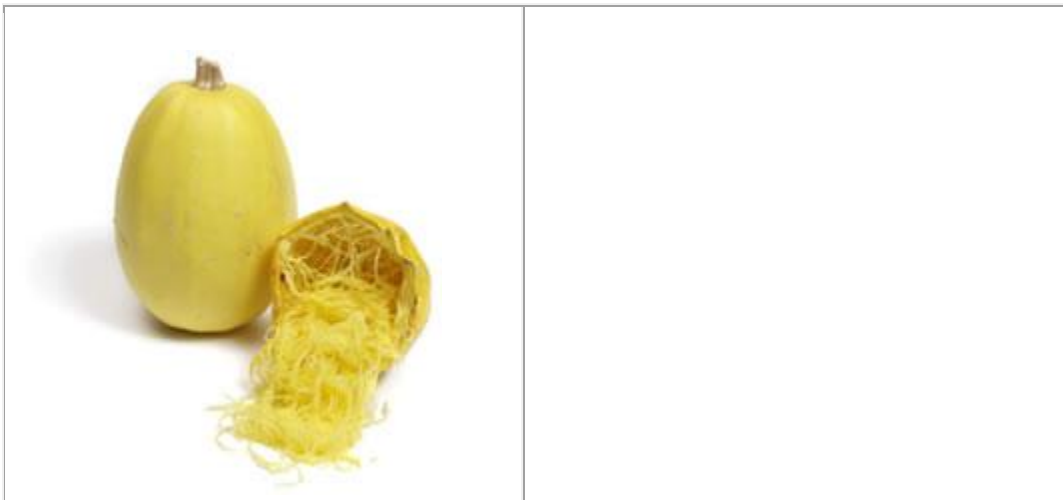
Most varieties of winter squash can be stored for several months if kept in a cool, dry, dark location. If exposed to temperatures below 50°F, it will suffer damage, and if it is exposed to excessive heat, it will begin to convert the starches to quickly. It is best to store the squash with part of the stem still attached to help hold the moisture in and they should not be wrapped when stored, unless it has been cut open. Then it should be wrapped in plastic and stored in the refrigerator for 4 to 5 days. Cooked squash can be stored in an airtight container in the refrigerator for 4 to 5 days or it can be placed in the freezer for longer storage.

### **Varieties:**

#### **Butternut Squash**

A long, pear-shaped squash with a tan skin and orange, sweetly flavored flesh. It is one of the most popular winter squashes and is also known as the pumpkin squash.

	
<p><b>Turban Squash</b></p> 	<p>A small to medium sized squash with a distinctive crowned top consisting of multiple top knots in white, green and orange colors. The whole squash is often used as a decorative table piece or as a tureen that is filled with squash soup. Firm textured, the inner golden flesh has a delicious hazelnut flavor after being baked or steamed. When preparing in an oven, cut the squash lengthwise from the stem to the bottom. Place the squash skin side up in a dish with 1/2 inch of water. Cover the dish and bake for 1 to 1 1/4 hours at 375 degrees. In a microwave, cook for approximately 20 minutes in a dish with a loose cover of plastic wrap. This squash is available year round, but best during August to October.</p>
<p><b>Acorn Squash</b></p>  <p>Green Acorn Squash</p>  <p>White Acorn Squash</p>	<p>A type of winter squash resembling an acorn in shape and typically measuring up to six inches in length. The most common variety has a dark green ridged outer skin and a deep yellow to orange flesh. Other varieties include the Table Queen, which has a white to cream-colored skin, or the Golden, which has a pumpkin orange colored skin with the traditional orange inner flesh. They are delicious when baked with brown sugar, honey, and butter. The acorn squash contains only a minor amount of beta-carotene, unlike other winter squashes, but is a good source of calcium</p>
<p><b>Spaghetti Squash</b></p>	<p>A winter squash whose flesh, when cooked, forms translucent spaghetti-like strands that have a mild flavor. It can be cooked by baking, boiling and steaming. Spaghetti squash is available throughout the year but is best September through February. When selecting, choose those with smooth skins, avoiding those with soft spots. The larger the squash, the thicker the strands. Store squash in a cool dry place and it should keep for a month or more. Spaghetti squash will not keep quite as long as some of the other winter squashes.</p>



***Delicata Squash***



A long oblong-shaped squash with a cream colored, green striped thick outer skin and a golden fine-textured inner flesh. Size may range from 5 to 10 inches in length. The squash can be baked or steamed and served as a side dish seasoned with butter and herbs. When preparing in an oven, cut the squash in half by cutting down the length of the oblong shape. Place the squash with the skin side down in a dish with 1/2 inch of water. Cover the dish and bake for 1/2 to 3/4 hour at 375 degrees. In a microwave, cook for approximately 20 minutes in a dish with a loose cover of plastic wrap. This squash is available year round, but best during August to October.

***Golden Nugget Squash***



A variety of winter squash, which is sometimes referred to as an Oriental pumpkin that has the appearance of a small pumpkin in shape and color. It ranges in size from one to three pounds. The outer flesh is thick and as the squash matures, it changes from a glossy orange to a duller orange appearance, which indicates that it is ready to harvest. The meat inside is pale yellow in color and limited in volume, but it provides a flavorful meal when cooked.





***Heart of Gold Squash***



An early winter squash that combines a sweet dumpling with an acorn squash to produce a small acorn shaped vegetable. The outer skin is cream colored with dark green stripes covering a fine-grained inner flesh that is orange when ripe. This squash has a sweet rich flavor and can be baked, mashed or steamed. Store in a cool dry place for up to 6 months.

***Kabocha Squash***

A pumpkin shaped winter squash. It has a rich, sweet flavor and when cooked its texture resembles that of a tender potato. Kabocha squash weighs an average of three pounds and has spotted or blotchy dark green skin. It can be baked, steamed, stuffed or pureed. Works well as a substitution in recipes that

	<p>call for pumpkin or sweet potatoes. Kabocha is generally available all year round. When selecting a Kabocha squash, do not select those that are soft or show pitting. Also, check that the stem is intact and looks fresh. Store up to one month in a cool dry location that has good air circulation.</p>
<p><b>Red Kuri Squash</b></p> 	<p>A thick-skinned orange colored squash that has the appearance of an oblong pumpkin without the ridges. Inside the hard outer skin there is a firm flesh that provides a very delicate and mellow flavor similar to the taste of chestnuts. This squash is available year round and can be baked, braised, pureed, or steamed to be served as a side dish or used as a base for soups. Also known as Orange Hokkaido or Uchiki Kuri squash.</p>
<p><b>Sweet Dumpling Squash</b></p> 	<p>A small plump squash that is only about four to five inches in diameter. Its skin is generally cream colored or light yellow with green stripes. The sweet dumpling's flesh is starchy and pale yellow in color but has a honey sweet flavor. Sweet dumpling squash are available September through December. When selecting, choose those with green stripes and those that are heavy for their size. Avoid squash with green skin, mottling and soft spots. Store unwrapped in a cool, dry location for up to 10 days.</p>
<p><b>Pumpkin</b></p> 	<p>A winter squash with orange skin and flesh. Their size can range from very small to very large, close to 1000 lbs. The larger pumpkins are generally grown only for size and are not used as a food. The sweet flesh of the pumpkin is used in baking, often pies, but is also used in puddings, soups, savory dishes and stuffing. In the United States the pumpkin is popular to use for ornamental purposes, such as jack-o'-lanterns for Halloween. They are generally available in late September through October. Canned pumpkin puree is also available in grocery stores or can be made from fresh pumpkin.</p>

## Winter Squash Preparation

### Basic Preparation

1. Wash squash under cool running water until all the dirt has been removed.
2. Using a cleaver or large knife, cut the squash in half (lengthwise or crosswise) and remove the seeds and stringy fibers from the cavity with a spoon. Winter squash can be difficult to cut and it is sometimes easier to bake the squash first for 25 or 30 minutes or microwave on high for 5 or 10 minutes and then let it stand for a few minutes before trying to cut it in half.
3. Once the squash is cut in half and seeds removed, it can be quartered, cubed, or sliced if required. Otherwise, cook squash as directed.
4. If the squash is going to be cooked whole, be sure to pierce the skin in several places to allow steam to escape and prevent squash from exploding.

## Cutting Large Winter Squash

Large winter squash are sold pre-cut in most supermarkets. For those who have grown large squash in their garden or prefer to buy "fresh", whole squash from the local market, the hard, thick skin of a winter squash poses a major challenge when it comes time to prepare the squash for cooking.

An example of a large, thick, bumpy skinned squash is the Hubbard squash. Shown here are two suggested techniques for cutting a large squash into two pieces.

Begin by making a cut in the skin of the large squash to prevent the blade from slipping. Place the blade of a large chef's knife into the shallow cut. Using a kitchen mallet, begin tapping the blade at the base of the knife until the squash has been cut through. This technique works best when the blade of the knife is large enough to cover the circumference of the squash.



If you have grown large squash in the garden and plan on serving them often, purchase a small hand saw to be used solely for this purpose. The saw cuts easily through the large squash and leaves behind a clean cut.





Using a large spoon or scraping tool, remove the stringy fibers and seeds from the cavity of the squash.



Clean seeds and fibers from each half before cooking. Cleaning the seeds and fibers out will leave quite a large cavity in the squash.



### Cutting Medium to Small Winter Squash

Acorn squash is cut by inserting a chef's knife and tapping with a kitchen mallet. Once the initial cut is made, re-position the mallet to the base of the knife blade and continue to tap until the squash falls into two separate pieces.



With a spoon, or scraping tool, remove the strings and seeds.



A butternut squash can be prepared in varying ways, depending largely on the way you are going to present it at the meal. The first step of both techniques is to remove the stem with sharp kitchen knife. If you plan to use the squash as a presentation piece, remove closer to the stem, minimizing the amount of flesh removed from the squash.



If your intent is to bake the squash and serve it in the skin as a presentation piece, slice the butternut squash directly down the center with a sharp kitchen knife.



The strings and seeds are then removed with a spoon or scraping tool.



If the butternut squash is cubed, mashed, or puréed, cut the squash into 2 separate pieces before slicing in half. Remove the upper section of the squash.



Cut the two sections in half using a sharp knife.



Cut each half in the same manner.



After each section has been cut in half, remove the stringy fibers and seeds from the cavity of the lower section. Cut halved pieces into smaller pieces if desired.



### Peeling Winter Squash

Because of the thick, tough skin, winter squash is typically not peeled. If a recipe calls for squash to be peeled and/or cubed, begin by following the method of partially baking in the microwave.

Pierce the skin of the squash with the tip of a sharp knife in several places. This will allow steam to escape and prevent the squash from exploding. Place the whole squash in a microwave safe dish and microwave for 6 to 8 minutes. After microwaving, allow the squash to stand for approximately 10 minutes.





After the squash stands for 10 minutes, begin peeling by cutting the skin off with a sharp knife. Continue to peel around the entire squash until all the skin is removed.



Once the squash is peeled, cut in half and scrape out all the seeds and stringy fibers from the center of the squash.



The squash can then be cut into the desired size pieces and cooked until done.

The squash can also be cut in half, seeds removed and cut into smaller pieces, before peeling the skin off. Experimenting with both methods will determine which one is preferred.

If the squash is to be mashed or puréed, leave the skin on. The flesh can be removed by scooping the meat of the squash out with a spoon after it is cook.

## Winter Squash Cooking

[Boiled](#) | [Steamed](#) | [Baked](#) | [Microwaved](#) | [Grilled](#)

There are several methods that can be used to cook winter squash. Some of the more common methods are shown below.

### Boiled

#### Method #1:

1. To boil an uncut, unpeeled squash, pierce the skin in several places with the tip of a sharp knife.
2. Place it in a large pot and add water until squash is covered.
3. Bring water to a boil and continue to cook, covered, at a medium boil for up to 1 hour.
4. The squash is done if tender when poked with a fork.

#### Method #2:

1. Cut squash into pieces that are approximately 3/4 inch square.
2. Place in a pan with just a little water.
3. Boil for 10 to 15 minutes or just until it is tender. Do not overcook.

Boiling is not recommended because of the tendency of the squash to become watery and lose flavor.

### Steamed

Steaming is a good method to use for cooking winter squash.

1. Cut squash in half, quarters, slices, or pieces and season as desired.
2. Place squash on steamer rack in a saucepan and cook over boiling water.
3. Cooking time may vary from 15 minutes to an hour, depending on the freshness and type of squash and the size pieces being steamed.

## Baked

Cut squash in half and remove seeds and stringy fibers as shown above.

Place squash halves, cut side down in a baking dish or on a cookie sheet. Pierce the skin several times to prevent the squash from exploding while it is baking.



Place the squash in an oven preheated to 350°F. Bake for 1 1/2 to 2 hours.

Check squash for doneness by poking with a fork in the thickest part of the squash. Squash should be tender when pierced. The longer the squash is baked the more water that will evaporate from the squash, making the squash sweeter in taste.



When done, scrape the cooked squash away from the skin and place in a bowl.



After all the squash is removed from the skin, add 2 to 3 tablespoons of butter and season to taste. The amount of butter will vary according to the size of the squash and personal taste.



Mash the squash with a fork until the butter is well blended. If necessary, warm squash in the microwave or place it bake in the oven for a short time so it will be hot when it is served.

Instead of mashing the squash it could be left on the skin, cut into wedges and then brushed with melted butter. Then sprinkled with salt, pepper and brown sugar.

### **Microwaved**

When cooking squash in the microwave, cooking times will vary according to the strength of the microwave being used.

Cut squash in half and remove seeds and stringy fibers as shown above in squash preparation. Pierce the skin in several places on each half to prevent the squash from exploding while it is cooking.



Place the squash in a glass bowl with cut sides facing the sides of the bowl. Cover the bowl with plastic wrap, leaving a vent on one edge for the steam to escape.



Place in the microwave and cook on high for 10 to 20 minutes. Poke squash with a fork to check for desired tenderness. If not done, place back in the microwave on high again and cook for an additional 3 to 5 minutes. Check again for doneness.



While the squash is cooking, prepare a glaze consisting of 1 1/2 tbsp. of butter, 1 1/2 tbsp. of brown sugar and a pinch of salt. Heat the mixture until the butter and sugar are well combined and it has begun to thicken. Place cooked squash on a cookie sheet with cut side up and drizzle glaze on the edges and in the cavity of the squash halves.



Place under the broiler for 5 to 7 minutes until the glaze has caramelized. Cut into smaller serving sizes if necessary and serve while hot.



## Grilled

Because of the dense, hard flesh that winter squash has, it is best to partial cook it before grilling. Follow the preparation instructions [above](#) for partial cooking and then peeling the squash.



Once the squash has been peeled, cut in half and seeded, cut it into 1 1/2 inch pieces.



Place the squash pieces on metal skewers and brush with melted butter.



Place the squash on the grill over indirect high heat. Cook with the hood down for 15 to 20 minutes, turning once through cooking time.



Check squash for doneness by poking with a fork. Squash should be tender when pierced.



When done, remove squash from the grill and brush with a mixture of 1/4 cup melted butter and 2 tablespoons of honey. Serve while warm.



## Tips



- When baking, add butter and brown sugar to the cavity for a sweeter taste.
- To remove some of the moisture from the squash before cooking, sprinkle the raw flesh with salt, place cavity side down on a couple of layers of paper towels and allow to stand for 20 to 30 minutes. The salt will draw the moisture out and the paper towel will absorb it. Rinse with cold water before cooking.
- To remove fibers from fibrous squash, whip cooked squash with an electric mixer. The fibers will be caught up in the mixer blades.
- The skin on the squash will be easier to remove after the squash is cooked.