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Using Storing and Preserving Winter Squash

Michigan State University Extension Service

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WINTER SQUASH

Michigan-grown winter squash is available September through November.

NUTRITION INFORMATION

One-half cup baked winter squash has:

- 40 Calories
- 1 gram fat.
- 3 grams fiber.

Winter squash is high in vitamin A and a good source of vitamin C. A food is high in a nutrient if a serving provides 20 percent or more of the Daily Value for that nutrient. It is a good source of a nutrient if it provides 10 to 19 percent of the Daily Value for that nutrient.

Nutrient information is based on the USDA nutrient composition database.

YIELD

One pound equals about:

- 1 large acorn squash.
- 4 half-cup servings.
- 1 1/2 cups mashed squash.

1 small acorn squash equals about 2 half-cup servings.

3 pounds of winter squash equal 2 pints canned.

10 pounds equal a canner load of 9 pints.

16 pounds equal a canner load of 7 quarts

HOW TO BUY



■ Choose winter squash that feel hard and heavy for their size. Slight variations in color are not important.

■ The stem should be rounded and dry, not shriveled, blackened or moist.

HOW TO STORE

Do not wash squash before storing.

Store whole winter squash in a cool (45 to 50 degrees F), dry place. If stored properly, most varieties will keep up to 3 months.

Store cut squash in plastic wrap in the refrigerator. Use cut squash within a week.

SQUASH TYPES



Acorn squash is round and dark green or orange on the outside. It is good for baking and goes well with sweet, nutty or spicy stuffing.

Butternut squash is pear-shaped and a creamy yellow to tan. It is perfect for mashing.



Hubbard squash grows very large and is often sold cut into pieces. After cooking, it mashes well and can be used in breads, muffins, pancakes, or soups.

Spaghetti squash is oblong and a creamy yellow on the outside. The inside is stringy and mild flavored. It can be served like pasta.



WINTER SQUASH

FOOD SAFETY TIPS

Scrub winter squash with a vegetable brush using cool running water before cooking and cutting.

Keep squash away from raw meat so that meat juices do not contaminate it.

QUICK AND EASY SERVING TIPS

- Top baked acorn squash with salt and pepper or applesauce and cinnamon.
- Mash butternut squash with a small amount of butter or margarine and brown sugar.
- Top spaghetti squash with a little butter or margarine or your favorite pasta sauce and Parmesan cheese.

HOW TO PREPARE

All winter squash bakes well. Steaming works for cut pieces. Most varieties have a sweet, buttery, firm flesh and can be substituted for one another in recipes, with the exception of spaghetti squash.

To bake whole squash

Scrub squash and pierce several times with a sharp knife. Place in a baking dish and bake at 400 degrees F, uncovered, until tender when pierced with a fork, about 45 to 60 minutes. If winter squash is baked with other foods or at a lower temperature, increase baking time.

To bake halved or cut squash

Scrub and cut squash in half or into pieces. Remove seeds and "strings" — unless it's spaghetti squash. For spaghetti squash, the "strings" are the squash. Put a small amount of water in a baking dish (about 1/4 inch deep). Put halves or pieces in the baking dish, cut side down. Bake uncovered at 350 degrees F, until tender, about 45 minutes.

To microwave whole or half squash

Scrub whole squash (such as an acorn squash). Pierce several times with a knife. Microwave on high power for 6 to 7 minutes. Rotate squash and turn over. Microwave another 6 to 7 minutes. Let stand for 5 minutes. Baking time varies, depending upon size of squash.

Or, scrub squash and cut in half. Remove seeds and "strings." Put about 1/4 inch of water in a microwave-safe baking dish. Put squash halves, cut side down, in the dish. Pierce squash several times with a knife. Microwave on high power for 6 to 7 minutes. Rotate baking dish and microwave another 6 to 7 minutes. Let stand for 5 minutes.

Note: Microwave cooking times are provided as a guide. Cooking times vary because of differences in microwave ovens. Check product often for desired doneness.

To steam

Scrub squash and cut in half or into pieces. Put 1 to 2 inches of water in a saucepan and bring to a boil. Put squash pieces into a steamer basket. Place steamer basket over the boiling water, cover and steam until tender, about 12 to 20 minutes. Larger pieces of squash take longer to cook.

HOW TO PRESERVE



To freeze winter squash

Scrub and cut squash into cooking-size pieces and remove seeds. Steam or bake squash (see above) until soft. Remove pulp from rind and mash (do not mash spaghetti squash; leave it in strings). Cool quickly by putting pan with squash in cold water. Stir squash occasionally to speed cooling. Put cooled squash in freezer containers leaving 1/2 inch headspace. Seal, label, date and freeze. Use frozen squash within 8 to 12 months for best quality.

Do not freeze more than one quart (2 to 3 pounds) of food per cubic foot of freezer capacity per day. One cubic foot will hold 30 quarts of food.

WINTER SQUASH

To can winter squash

Pressure canning: PRESSURE CANNING IS THE ONLY SAFE METHOD FOR CANNING WINTER SQUASH.

Scrub squash, remove seeds, cut into 1-inch slices and peel. Cut flesh into 1-inch cubes. Add to a saucepan of boiling water and boil 2 minutes.

Caution: do not mash or puree. Fill clean canning jars with cubes, leaving 1 inch of headspace. Fill jar to 1 inch from top with boiling hot cooking liquid. Remove air bubbles and wipe jar rims. Place each lid, gasket down, onto the cleaned jar-sealing surface. Then fit the metal screw band over the flat lid and follow the manufacturer's guidelines enclosed in or printed on the box for tightening the jar lids properly. Process using the following general pressure canner directions and recommended process times.

General pressure canner directions (for a dial-gauge or weighted-gauge canner)

- Put 2 to 3 inches of hot water in the canner. Place filled jars on the rack, using a jar lifter. Fasten canner lid securely.
- Leave weight off vent port or open petcock. Heat at the highest setting until steam flows from the petcock or vent port.
- Maintain high heat setting, exhaust steam 10 minutes, and then place weight on vent port or close petcock. The canner will pressurize during the next 3 to 4 minutes.
- Check the chart for the recommended process time for jar size and altitude. Start timing the process when the pressure reading on the dial gauge indicates that the recommended pressure has been reached, or when the weighted gauge begins to jiggle or rock.
- Regulate heat under the canner to maintain a steady pressure at or slightly above the correct gauge pressure. Quick and large pressure variations during processing may cause unnecessary liquid losses from jars.

6. When the timed process is completed, turn off the heat, remove the canner from heat, if possible, and let the canner depressurize. **DO NOT FORCE-COOL THE CANNER.** Standard-size heavy-walled canners require about 30 minutes to cool when loaded with pints and 45 minutes with quarts. Newer thin-walled canners cool more rapidly and are equipped with vent locks. These canners are depressurized when the vent lock piston drops to a normal position.

7. After the canner is depressurized, remove the weight from the vent port or open the petcock. Wait 2 minutes, unfasten the lid, and remove it carefully. Open the lid away from you so that the steam does not burn your face.

8. Remove jars from canner with a jar lifter and place them on a towel or rack. **DO NOT** retighten screw bands. Air cool jars 12 to 24 hours. Remove screw bands and check lid seals. If the center of the lid is indented, wash, dry, label and store the jar in a clean, cool, dark, dry place. If after 12 to 24 hours the lid is unsealed, examine and replace the jar if defective, use a new lid and a screw band, and **REPROCESS** as before. Dump out squash and liquid into a pan, reheat until boiling, and fill hot jars with squash and liquid, leaving 1 inch headspace. Place **NEW LIDS** and screw bands on jars and process for the time recommended below. When jars have sealed and cooled, remove, wash and store screw bands separately. Squash is best if consumed within a year and safe as long as lids remain vacuum sealed.

Recommended process times

Winter Squash in a Dial-Gauge Pressure Canner

Style of pack	jar size	process time	canner pressure (pounds pressure) at altitudes of			
			0-2,000 ft.	2,001-4,000 ft.	4,001-6,000 ft.	6,001-8,000 ft.
Hot	pint	55 min.	11 lbs.	12 lbs.	13 lbs.	14 lbs.
Hot	quart	90 min.	11 lbs.	12 lbs.	13 lbs.	14 lbs.

Recommended process times

Winter Squash in a Weighted-Gauge Pressure Canner

Style of pack	jar size	process time	canner pressure (pounds pressure) at altitudes of	
			0-1,000 ft.	Above-1,000 ft.
Hot	pint	55 min.	10 lbs.	15 lbs.
Hot	quart	90 min.	10 lbs.	15 lbs.

WINTER SQUASH

INFORMATION

For more information on food, food preservation, USDA-tested and approved canning recipes, nutrition and health, see <<http://www.msue.msu.edu>>.

Information in this bulletin is based on the USDA Canning Guide (September 1994); Using and Storing Winter Squash (Michigan State University Extension, 1993); E-1885, Food Preservation-Squash (Michigan State University Extension, 1990); and So Easy to Preserve (University of Georgia Cooperative Extension Service, 1993).



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