

## **October 26: Winter Squash**

Many of you may already be taking advantage of the fall/winter squash selections in stores and from local growers. These squashes offer many nutrients and health benefits in addition to their fall décor qualities. Squash that are harvested in the fall are those known as winter squash. Pumpkin, butternut, acorn, and spaghetti squash are some of the more well known varieties but there are also delicata, buttercup, carnival, and hubbard squash that thrive at this time of the year. Each type differs in color, shape, size, and flavor but all have thicker shells than summer squash. These thick shells can be more of a challenge to work with but are what make these squashes shelf-stable for a few months when kept in proper conditions.

Choose firm, well-shaped squash that feel heavy for their size. They should have hard, tough skin without soft spots or areas that have sunken in. Store squash in a cool, dry place to keep them shelf-stable for several months. Winter squash varieties can be baked, boiled, steamed, cooked in an electric pressure cooker, and even roasted in an air fryer. Be sure to first rinse the squash under running water prior to peeling or cutting through the skin. Depending on what you plan to with the squash will determine whether you peel before or after cooking methods. When steaming, peel should be removed prior to cooking. If baking, there is no need to peel prior to the baking process. Simply remove the ends, cut the squash in half, remove the seeds and bake as squash halves. Butternut squash is a much more ‘forgiving’ squash to peel and work with before your choice of cooking methods. Acorn squash is one that can be much more temperamental and difficult to peel and prepare prior to cooking. Acorn squash has many grooves that makes it more challenging to peel before baking.

Nutritionally, these winter squash provide vitamin A, vitamin C, folate, potassium, calcium, iron, and fiber. They also provide us with antioxidants that we know work to keep the ‘good stuff’ in our bodies and shuffle the ‘bad things’ out. Seeds of squash can also be eaten! Save the seeds you scoop out and eat them as a crunchy snack. Winter squash seeds can be prepared and roasted in the same way as pumpkin seeds (also a winter squash). Separate the seeds from the pulp and lay them in a single layer on a cookie sheet. Sprinkle with a sweet or savory seasoning, bake at a low temperature of about 170°F for 15-20 minutes and enjoy!