

Guide to Market - Fresh Winter Squash



1. Green Kabocha Squash - The squat, round-shaped Japanese squash has a rough, dark-green skin that's sometimes mottled with orange or faint white stripes. It's starchy yellow-orange flesh has a pleasant sweet potato-like flavour with a soft honey sweetness.

Use: drier and denser than most squash, the kabocha holds its shape when cooked in liquid, making it a great choice for adding to stews and braises. Its flavour marries well with Asian ingredients like soy sauce, ginger and sesame oil. Try adding peeled, diced kabocha to a coconut milk based Thai curry or a vegetarian chili.

2. Butternut Squash - The slim neck and bulbous bottom give the butternut squash its distinctive bell shape. With its sweet, creamy, dark-orange flesh and smooth, easy-to-peel skin, the butternut is one of the most versatile of the winter squash. For easier handling cut the narrow portion from the body and work with each section separately.

Use: takes well to many cooking methods - delicious when roasted. The rich flesh and sweetness of the butternut makes it ideal for soups, risotto, purées, gnocchi and ravioli or in any recipe where the smooth texture and sweetness will be highlighted. It pairs perfectly with a range of flavours including orange, lemon, balsamic vinegar, sharp cheeses, robust herbs, bold spices, and smoky bacon.

3. Red Kabocha Squash - Squat, like its green counterpart, has faint white stripes running from top to bottom. The main differences between the red kabocha and the green variety are the colour and taste. The red offers a slightly sweeter taste than the more savoury flavour of the green.

Use: see Green Kabocha



4. ***Carnival Squash*** – A cross between an acorn and sweet dumpling squash, the exterior of the carnival squash is distinguished by its deeply furrowed top and variegated patterns of orange and green. The flesh is firm, dry and pale orange with a large and fibrous seed cavity. When cooked the soft texture tastes slightly nutty with sweet nuances of maple syrup.

Use: bake it whole, cut in half or in pieces. Add to stews, risotto, curries and pasta dishes or once baked, puree into a soup or sauce. Good for stuffing the carnival squash pairs well with butter and spices such as ginger, garlic, cinnamon, nutmeg, maple syrup, toasted walnuts.

5. ***Sugar Pumpkin*** – (aka: Pie pumpkin) a baking pumpkin known for its exceptional flavour and texture. One of the sweetest varieties with a smooth orange skin and thick, flesh-packed walls. The firm flesh of the sugar pumpkin cooks down to a silky smooth consistency.

Use: commonly used for making desserts such as pies, cheesecake, flans or custards. Puree the sugar pumpkin and use instead of canned pumpkin in any recipe. Once cooked down and pureed it can also be used to make soups, casseroles, risotto, gnocchi, chili, empanadas, curries and more.

6. ***Sweet Dumpling Squash*** - This small, compact squash has an edible rind that's soft yellow or cream, mottled with green and orange markings. The smooth textured, tender orange flesh offers a mild honey flavour much like a sweet potato. Dumpling squash can be difficult to peel, therefore they are most often baked or roasted with their skin on.

Use: Cut in half and stuff cavities with meats, cheeses, grains, or other veggies. The sweet dumpling pairs well with nuts, strong cheeses and dried fruit. Bake whole, scoop out the flesh and mash with butter and cinnamon or add to mashed potatoes; puree and add to soups.

7. ***Spaghetti Squash*** - the oval yellow squash has a stringy flesh that, once cooked separates into mild-tasting, spaghetti-like strands. It has a tender texture with a mild flavour and unlike other winter squash it lacks sweetness. The firm exterior ranges in colour from pale to bright yellow. Spaghetti squash on the larger side tend to have the best flavour and thicker “noodles”.

Use: roast or steam it, then scrape out the strands. Dress with butter and fresh herbs; top with a pasta sauce, pesto or mix in other veggies and enjoy as you would spaghetti. Roast squash halves until tender, scrape to form noodles and toss with melted butter, chopped parsley and grated parmesan.

8. ***Blue Hubbard Squash*** - Most are huge, bumpy, and lumpy, and often sold in pre-cut wedges. The Blue Ballet, pictured here is quite small, making it easier to store and prepare at home. Underneath the hard and inedible gray-blue skin is a sweet-tasting, very flavourful orange flesh.

Use: steam, bake, mash or roast. Serve topped with brown sugar or maple syrup and a pat of butter melted in the empty cavity. Roast bite-sized pieces with olive oil, chopped fresh rosemary, salt and pepper with a whole chicken. It can also be mashed and seasoned before serving - roast halves with toasty spices like coriander, fennel, cumin, nutmeg or curry powder, then mash the flesh.



9. ***Delicata Squash*** – an heirloom variety recently reintroduced into the culinary world is also called the “sweet potato squash” because of its creamy, moist texture and mild sweet potato flavour. The delicata has a pale yellow rind with dark green pinstripe, and more closely resembles the summer squash family with its thin edible skin. Small to medium sizes are best for cooking.

Use: smaller than most winter squash they are easy to prepare (no need to peel). Their flavour is rich when roasted or sautéed. Half lengthwise, seed, then cut into slices or stuff, brushing with a little olive oil to burnish the skin and then bake. Roast with other root vegetables and drizzle with olive oil. Try sliced, then steam until tender and toss with a balsamic vinaigrette and pine nuts.

10. ***Red Kuri Squash*** (aka: Orange Hokkaido, Red Hubbard, Potimarron) - Like all Hubbard's, the red Kuri has an asymmetrical, lopsided look to it. Inside the hard outer skin is a firm flesh with a delicate, mellow-chestnut like flavour. The skin, though hard is thin and once cooked is edible.

Use: difficult to peel they are most often cooked in their skin. Cut in half, scoop out seeds or cut into wedges or cubes and roast. Add cooked squash to soups, risottos, stews, and curries. Grate flesh and bake into gratins and casseroles. Pureed, its used in sweet preparations such as pies, quick breads and muffins. The seed cavity is ideal for stuffing - the flavour balances well with onion, fresh herbs, mustard greens, maple syrup, curry powder, fennel, parmesan cheese and olive oil.

POWER FOODS: naturally low in fat and calories winter squash deliver significant nutritional benefits, being rich in Vitamins A (beta carotene), B6, E and the antioxidant-rich Vitamin C. A super food source of magnesium, potassium, and manganese they also provide dietary fibre, making them a heart-healthy choice. Squash may have anti-inflammatory effects because of their high content of antioxidant nutrients including omega 3's.

11. ***Buttercup Squash*** - are part of the Turban squash family - hard shells with turban-like shapes. Compact, this squash has an inedible dark green rind, sometimes accented with lighter green streaks. The flesh is sweet with notes of nuttiness and a fine-grained texture that's relatively dense.

Use: can be prepared in a variety of way - from steaming to roasting, used in an array of dishes ranging from savoury soups to sweet pies. Baked, steamed, roasted or boiled, their subtle taste and velvety texture makes a great mash or soup. Try simmering in a curry dish.

12. ***Acorn Squash*** - is a hard-shelled winter squash shaped like its name sake. It may have white-gold, warm orange or dark green skin, but all have the same golden moist flesh inside. Peeling is difficult, so cut in half or slice it. The hard rind helps the squash hold its shape when baked.

Use: the acorn squash is so delicious it doesn't need much fussing with - simple is best - bake, stuff, mash. Trim the tip and end just enough so the squash can stand upright. Cut in half, remove the seeds and fibers. Rub the flesh with butter or oil, season with salt and pepper; or try sprinkling with brown sugar or maple syrup, then bake cut side up, until tender. Once halved it can also be stuffed - to compliment the flavour of the acorn squash use fillings that include apples, currants or chestnuts. The acorn can also be cut in rings for baking and roasting.

Storing Winter Squash

Place whole squash on top of thick pads of newspaper in cool, dry, well ventilated location, if possible between 45-50°F. Check on a regular basis for rot and use within 2-6 months depending on the variety.

Refrigerate tightly wrapped cut pieces of winter squash and use within 3-4 days.

Once squash is cooked, either by steaming or baking, the flesh can be stored frozen until needed.

Preparing Winter Squash

Wash the exterior of the squash just before using.

Using water when cooking: when water is used keep the quantity small to avoid losing flavour and nutrients.

Peeling: since the rind makes most squash difficult to peel it's easier to cook with the skin on and then scoop out the cooked flesh.

Cutting: most winter squash have hard skin and flesh. To cut in half grasp the squash firmly and using a sharp chef's knife slice through to the center. Then flip and cut the other side until the squash falls open. Remove and discard seeds and fibers.

Hint: place a large whole squash in the microwave for 2-3 minutes, then cut it easily. Be sure to perforate a few times with a knife before putting in the microwave so it doesn't explode!



Pumpkin Purée from Fresh Sugar Pumpkins

- Slice off stem end of one sugar pumpkin 2 inches from the top; scrape out seeds and membranes, reserving seeds for toasting if desired.
- Lightly brush inside of the pumpkin with oil or butter.
- Cook on a baking sheet at 375°F until flesh is easily pierced with a knife, about 1-1 1/2 hours. Cool on rack.
- Scoop flesh into a blender or food processor; process until smooth.
- Transfer purée to a sieve or colander lined with cheesecloth and set over a bowl.
- Cover loosely with plastic wrap and allow to drain refrigerated, overnight to eliminate excess water.
- Use purée within a few days or freeze for later use.

Using Winter Squash

Look for squash heavy for their size, that have hard, deep-colored skin free from blemishes.

Most varieties can be puréed, roasted, steamed, sautéed and baked. Once cooked and mashed the flesh can be used in soups, main dishes, vegetable side dishes even breads, muffins and sweets such as muffin, custards and pies

Cooking with Winter Squash

Any sweet, orange-fleshed winter squash can be substituted one for another in recipes.

Squash can be cut in half or pieces for cooking.

Dress any cooked squash with butter and fresh herbs, a cream, marina or cheese sauce, maple syrup, and nuts or stewed fruit.

Any type of pureed squash can be used in place of canned pumpkin in a recipe.

Pieces of squash can be added to soups, stews and casseroles etc.

Bake: a whole squash - pierce the rind with a fork and bake at 375°F for length of time indicated in the recipe. Many varieties are cut in half, baked and served in the shell. They can also be stuffed with a filling then baked.

Boil or steam: cut into quarters or rings and cook until tender. Boil or mash as you would potatoes. Add peeled squash to soups, stews, beans, gratins and ragouts.

Cooked: squash is done when a fork easily pierces the peel and flesh. Let sit until cool enough to handle then proceed with the recipe.

Toasted Pumpkin Seeds

Separate pumpkin seeds from the stringy pulp, rinse in colander and dry thoroughly with a towel. Spread on a baking sheet, drizzle with olive oil and toss to coat. Sprinkle with salt and smoked paprika. Bake in 300°F oven, stirring several times, until golden, about 30-35 minutes. Store in an airtight container.

Note: use only enough oil to barely coat the seeds or they'll be greasy. Use any seasoning blend you like to flavour seeds and adjust to your taste buds.

Spice it up: along with salt and oil toss with one of these combinations:

1/2 tsp each turmeric and chili powder

1 tsp Za'atar, 1/2 tsp finely grated lemon zest