Squish Squash SQUASH

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Pumpkins come from two different species Cucurbita pepo (most jack o’lantern and some pie pumpkins) and C. maxima (extremely large pumpkins grown for competition and decoration). Make sure to check variety descriptions carefully when purchasing seed. Pumpkins grown for jack-o’-lanterns are usually not eaten, as the flesh is bland and stringy, although the roasted seeds are good to eat. Pie pumpkins often have smaller, sweeter fruit. Some pumpkin varieties produce “naked” or hull-less seeds especially nice for roasting, since there is no hard shell to crack from the seeds. These seeds have lower germination rates, particularly in cool soil, so they are more difficult to grow.

Edible winter squash belong to three different species: Cucurbita pepo (acorn, delicata, and spaghetti types), C. moschata (butternut types), and C. maxima (Hubbard, kabocha, and buttercup types). Some varieties produce small squashes the right size for individual servings, while others produce enormous fruits of fifteen pounds or more, suitable for soups, pies, mashing, or freezing. Some can be stored through the winter; others should be used within a few weeks after harvest. Choose varieties that suit your tastes as well as your ability to handle and store the squash. While a giant Hubbard squash may be attractive as an autumn decoration, a small household may be unable to utilize it as food. Note the days to harvest for the varieties you are considering. Longer-season varieties may be difficult to ripen properly in parts of Minnesota.

Winter squash should be stored in a cool but not cold place, ideally around 55°F, with good air movement. Relative humidity between 50% and 75% is best. Check squash in storage frequently and remove any that are soft or show signs of spoilage. Remember to treat them gently.

If appropriate storage is not available, squash can be cooked and mashed, then frozen. Canning of mashed or pureed squash is not recommended because of the density of squash in the jars; it’s nearly impossible for the heat of the canning process to penetrate to the center of the jar.

\*Another option: cut into thin rounds and dehydrate for chips

Many varieties have separate sexes in flowers. This characteristic is referred to as a monoecious flowering habit. Blossom drop of male flowers is, to some extent, normal because only the female flowers produce fruit. Female flowers can be identified by the swollen ovary at the base of the flower.

Information from: College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences and University of Minnesota Extension Logos

Whole Wheat Squash Ravioli

Spaghetti Squash Pancakes

Tomato Red Pepper Jelly

Winter Greens

Acorn Wheat Berry Salad

Whole Wheat Squash Ravioli

serves 4

Ingredients

2 pounds winter squash

4 cups whole wheat flour

3 eggs

2 tablespoons olive oil

2 cloves garlic roasted

1/4 cup ricotta or chevre

2 tablespoons parmesan

1/4 teaspoon red pepper flakes

1/4 cup parsley, chopped

1 teaspoon nutmeg

3 Tablespoons garlic oil

Toasted Hazelnuts

prep: 1 hour 30 minutes

total: 1 hour 50 minutes

tools

baking sheet

stand mixer

pasta roller

large pot

medium sauté pan

pastry cutter

cheese grater

instructions

1. Preheat the oven to 450F. Peel the winter squash and cut it into quarters. Remove the seeds, and arrange on a baking sheet. Drizzle with olive oil and roast in the oven until softened, about 35 minutes.

2. Put the flour and eggs in the bowl of a stand mixer. Mix on medium speed until it forms a dough and pulls away from the sides. Switch to a dough hook and knead for 15 minutes. Roll the kneaded dough into a ball, cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate for 20 minutes.

Toast the hazelnuts and chop roughly.

3. When the squash has finished cooking, allow it to cool. Then purée it in a food processor with the olive oil and roasted garlic until smooth. Mix in the ricotta, parmesan, red pepper flakes, parsley and nutmeg. Season with salt and pepper.

4. Remove dough from the refrigerator, unwrap it and sprinkle it with a tablespoon of flour to keep it from sticking. Cut the dough into quarters, and flatten them with the heel of your hand. Feed the dough into the pasta roller on the largest setting, flouring it between rolls to keep it from sticking, until you have a long, even sheet. Continue to pass the dough through the rollers on progressively thinner settings until it is thin enough to cook quickly, but thick enough to hold its filling (approximately the thickness of linguine).

5. Cut the long sheet of pasta lengthwise into thirds. Place a tablespoon of filling along the bottom half of the strip, leaving an equal space above the filling so that the pasta can be folded over to create a square. Repeat at even intervals, approximately two finger widths apart.

6. Fold the pasta sheet over the filling, and press your fingers around it to push out as much air as possible. Using a pastry cutter or a sharp knife, remove the excess pasta on the edges and separate the squares.

7. Set a pot of salted water on the stove to boil. When it reaches a rolling boil, cook the pasta for 3-5 minutes until it floats and the filling is heated through.

8. While the ravioli cooks, heat the garlic oil in a medium sauté pan over medium heat. As soon as it's warm, add the pepper flakes to taste and cook. Remove the ravioli out of the water with a slotted spoon and gently place in the pan with the garlic oil (warmed). Grate some fresh parmesan over the ravioli before serving and toasted hazelnuts.

Tomato Red Pepper Jelly

Ingredients:

1 tbsp oil

1 onion, diced

1 red bell pepper, seeded and diced

1-2 tbsp dried red pepper flakes

2 large tomatoes, chopped

Generous 1 cup cider vinegar

Generous 1/2 cup brown sugar

Over medium-low heat, in a saucepan saute onion for about 5 minutes until it begins to brown. Add pepper and flakes and cook for an additional 2 minutes, then add tomatoes, vinegar and sugar. Bring to a boil, reduce heat and simmer until mixture thickens to a jelly consistency, about 45 minutes.

Spaghetti Squash Pancakes

Servings: 10

Makes About 30 Patties

A pancake without any starch, these little gems make great side dishes. You can dress them up with all kinds of sauces or dressings, but sometimes they are nice simply cooked in olive oil and sprinkled with a little salt and coarsely ground pepper.

Ingredients:

6 cups spaghetti squash, cooked by your favorite method and separated into strands

4 eggs

2 tablespoons chopped green onion or chives

salt and pepper to taste

oil for skillet

Instructions:

Add eggs, onion or chives, salt and pepper to cooked spaghetti squash. Form into 3 inch patties. Heat oil in a skillet and cook for 3-4 minutes on each side. Drain on paper towel and keep warm in oven at 225 degrees F.

**Winter Greens**

Ingredients:

2 bunches of winter greens

Salt

Pepper

2 apples small dice

1 Tablespoon oil

To de-stem each leaf of chard/kale, grab the main stalk in one hand and strip the leaf from the stem all the way up with the other. I then tear the big leaves into bite-sized pieces, but you can use a knife for this task if you prefer. Wash the greens in a big bowl (or sink) full of clean water, rinsing and swishing to rinse away any stubborn grit and dirt. Drain, rinse again, and set aside.

Hold off cooking the greens until just before eating. Then, in a large skillet heat the olive oil. Add a couple big pinches of salt with the apples. Once cooked thoroughly, add the greens. They should hiss and spit a bit when they hit the pan. Stir, add water and cover for a few minutes. Sauté a bit, remove the pan from the heat. Taste, add a bit of salt if needed, and serve immediately if not sooner.

Winter Squash Flan with Orange Caramel

 For the caramel:

160 g/5½ oz. sugar

Water

A few drops of apple cider vinegar

2 tsp. orange butter (see recipe for Winter Vegetable Lasagna)

 1. Combine the sugar in a medium saucepan with enough water to make a wet sand consistency. Add the vinegar and cook over medium-high heat until a deep amber caramel forms. This is generally just after it starts to smoke a bit. If it smokes a lot and turns black, start over.

 2. Immediately remove the pan from heat and stir in the butter to stop the cooking. Pour a thin layer of caramel into each of six ramekins (150 ml/5 oz. capacity or thereabouts).

For the custard:

240 g/8½ oz. puréed winter squash (preferably roasted)

490 ml/2 cups milk

60 ml/2 oz. cream

60 g/2 oz. brown sugar

2 eggs, lightly beaten

 1. Preheat oven to 175 C/350 F, and bring a kettle of water to a boil.

 2. Combine squash, milk, cream, and brown sugar in a saucepan. Heat over medium heat, stirring frequently, until it comes to a simmer. Remove from heat and let the mixture cool a bit.

 3. Pour a small amount of the hot milk mixture into the eggs, whisking constantly. When all is combined, slowly whisk in the rest of the milk. Strain the custard into a measuring jug or something with a pouring spout (this will make your life a lot easier).

 4. Set the caramel-lined ramekins on a rimmed sheet pan and evenly distribute the custard between them. Place the pan into the oven and pour boiling water into the sheet pan so that it comes a little way up the sides of the ramekins.

 5. Bake about 20 minutes until the tops of the custards are just beginning to color. They should jiggle slightly in the center and a thin-bladed knife inserted in between the center and the edge should come out clean.

 6. Remove the ramekins from the water bath and cool to room temperature. Chill completely.

 7. To plate, run a thin-bladed knife around the outer edge of the custard. Invert a serving plate over the ramekin and flip over so the plate is on the bottom. If the custard hasn’t already slid out, gently shake or tap the ramekin until it does. Serve alone or accompanied by pine nut-sage brittle.

Pine Nut-Sage Brittle

 100 g/3½ oz. sugar

45 ml/1½ oz. water

70 g/2½ oz. honey

115 g/4 oz. pine nuts

A pinch of sea salt

½ Tbsp. butter (use orange butter if you have some on hand)

15 g/½ oz. fresh sage, chiffonnade (sliced into very thin strips)

¼ tsp. baking soda

 1. In a small saucepan, combine sugar, water, and honey. Cook over medium-high heat until it reaches 129 C/264 F.

 2. Add the pine nuts and salt and cook, stirring frequently, to 159 C/318 F.

 3. Remove from heat and stir in the butter, then the sage, and finally the baking soda. The candy will foam up, so be careful.

 4. Pour onto an oiled sheet pan (or a Silpat, if you’re lucky enough to have one), and spread into an even layer. Let cool a few minutes. At this point, you could just leave the brittle to harden completely, but it looks a lot sexier if you take the time to pull it into elegant shapes. Wearing protective gloves (I use 2 pair of rubber or latex gloves) pick up a small portion of the edge of the brittle. Carefully work your fingers underneath and when you have a big enough piece, pull it away from the mass and stretch it a bit. Place the piece of brittle on a sheet of foil to harden. Repeat until all the brittle has been stretched.

 5. Try not to eat it all in one sitting.

Makes enough to garnish 6 flans, with leftovers for snacking.**Wheat Berry Salad**

Wheat berries are whole unprocessed wheat kernels. They require an extended period of cooking to tenderize the grain, so use that time to cook your squash.

Yield: 4 servings (serving size: 1 stuffed squash half)

Ingredients

 \* 1 tablespoon vegetable oil

 \* 1 1/2 cups finely chopped onion

 \* 1 cup uncooked wheat berries

 \* 1/2 teaspoon mustard seeds

 \* 1/4 cup chopped dry-roasted cashews

 \* 1 tablespoon grated peeled fresh ginger

 \* 1 jalapeño pepper, seeded and minced

 \* 2 cups water

 \* 1/4 teaspoon salt

 \* 1 (14 1/2-ounce) can vegetable broth

 \* 2 tablespoons minced fresh cilantro

 \* 1 tablespoon fresh lemon juice

 \* 2 acorn squash (about 1 pound each)

 \* 1 tablespoon maple syrup

 \* 1/8 teaspoon ground cinnamon

 \* Cooking spray

 \* Cilantro sprigs (optional)

Preparation

Preheat oven to 350°.

Heat oil in a medium saucepan over medium-high heat. Add onion, wheat berries, and mustard seeds; sauté 3 minutes or until onion is tender. Add nuts, ginger, and jalapeño; sauté 1 minute. Add water, salt, and broth; bring to a boil. Cover, reduce heat, and simmer 2 hours or until tender. Stir in minced cilantro and juice. Remove from heat; keep warm.

While wheat mixture cooks, prepare squash. Cut squash lengthwise in half; discard seeds. Combine syrup and cinnamon; brush over squash. Place squash halves, cut sides down, on a baking sheet coated with cooking spray. Bake at 350° for 40 minutes or until tender. Divide the wheat mixture evenly among squash halves. Garnish with cilantro sprigs, if desired.

Let the Squash Saga begin: Information to feed your brain

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Many varieties have separate sexes in flowers. This characteristic is referred to as a monoecious flowering habit. Blossom drop of male flowers is, to some extent, normal because only the female flowers produce fruit. Female flowers can be identified by the swollen ovary at the base of the flower.

How to Select and Store

Winter squash is easily prone to decay, so it is important to carefully inspect it before purchase. Choose ones that are firm, heavy for their size and have dull, not glossy, rinds. The rind should be hard as soft rinds may indicate that the squash is watery and lacking in flavor. Avoid those with any signs of decay, which manifest as areas that are water-soaked areas or moldy.

Winter squash has a much longer storage life than summer squash. Depending upon the variety, it can be kept for between one week to six months. It should be kept away from direct exposure to light and should not be subject to extreme heat or extreme cold. The ideal temperature for storing winter squash is between 50 and 60°F. Once it is cut, cover the pieces of winter squash in plastic wrap and store them in the refrigerator, where they will keep for one or two days. The best way to freeze winter squash is to first cut it into pieces of suitable size for individual recipes.

Tips for Preparing Winter Squash:

After washing winter squash, cut it in half and remove the seeds and fibrous material in the cavity. Depending upon the recipe preparation, you can either use it peeled or unpeeled.

Alternatively, pierce the squash near the stem with a knife to allow any steam to escape, then bake in a 350° oven for 45 minutes to an hour, until a knife can be easily inserted near the stem. As you would before carving a pumpkin, cut out a small circle around the stem, remove this piece from the squash, and scoop out the seeds and fibrous material in the cavity.

A Few Quick Serving Ideas:

 \* Top puréed cooked winter squash with cinnamon and maple syrup.

 \* Steam cubes of winter squash and then dress with olive oil, tamari, ginger and pumpkin seeds.

 \* Top "strings" of spaghetti squash with pasta sauce.

 \* Add cubes of winter squash to your favorite vegetable soup recipe.

 \*Cut into thin rounds and dehydrate for chips

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"Cucurbitacean - a person who regards pumpkins or squash with deep, often rapturous love."

Information from:

\*College of Food, Agricultural and Natural Resource Sciences and University of Minnesota Extension Logos. *Growing Pumpkins and Winter Squash in Minnesota Home Gardens.*

Check out this website for more descriptions…

http://www.recipetips.com/kitchen-tips/t--830/all-about-winter-squash.asp