

# WINTER SQUASH

## About Winter Squash History

Similar to pumpkins, winter squash is believed to be indigenous to North America. Squash has been consumed for more than 10,000 years, originating in an area between Guatemala and Mexico. Squash was first cultivated for its seeds, not its flesh. Over time, fleshier varieties that taste better have been developed. Christopher Columbus took squash to Europe from the New World, and it has become a worldwide staple.

## The Plant

There are several varieties of winter squash. Some of the more popular ones are acorn, butternut, hubbard, and spaghetti.

Winter squash is a source of complex carbohydrates and fiber. It is a source of vitamin C, potassium, niacin, and iron. It's high in beta carotene. Beta carotene is converted into vitamin A in the body. Beta carotene has been linked to prevention of cancer and heart disease, and it's essential for healthy skin, vision, and bone development.

## How to Buy

While winter squash can be purchased year-round in your local market, the harvest season is from early fall through winter. Choose squash that are heavy for their size and have a hard, deep-colored dry rind. Avoid squash with bruises, cuts, or soft spots because they can indicate early spoilage. A tender, soft rind is a sign of immaturity and indicates poor eating quality.

## How to Prepare

Baking is the most popular method for preparing winter squash, but it can be steamed, simmered, or mashed.

Squash can be baked either whole or in halves. To bake halves, wash the squash under running water. Slice the squash in half and remove the seeds and fiber with a spoon. Place the halves, cut side up, in a casserole dish with 1 to 2 inches of water (to prevent the squash from drying out). Bake at 350 degrees for 45 to 60 minutes till tender when pierced by a fork. The cooking time will vary depending on the type of squash.

## How to Store

Squash can be flavored with spices, herbs, salt, and pepper before or after baking. Some squash varieties can keep for up to three months or more if stored in a cool, dry place with good ventilation. Ideal temperature is 45 to 55 degrees Fahrenheit.

Squash can also be frozen for later use. To find more information about preserving squash and other foods safely, please refer to the University of Georgia National Center for Food Preservation's web page ([www.uga.edu/nchfp](http://www.uga.edu/nchfp)).

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