All squashes are descended from species originating in South America. It is believed that zucchini was developed in Italy and brought to the United States by Italian immigrants in the early 1920s. In some European countries, zucchini is called “courgette.”

Summer squash is approximately 94 percent water, very low in calories, and is a good source of vitamins A and potassium. Most of the nutrition is in the skin. The most common types of summer squash are yellow (sometimes called straightneck), crookneck, and zucchini.

All three are species of the Cucurbita pepo. Although in the same family as winter squash, summer squash are more delicate and perishable and do not store well. They are best enjoyed fresh during the summer months.

Summer squash are available year-round in most stores; local ones are at their peak from early to late summer. When buying squash, select those that are 6 to 8 inches in length. Larger squash are more fibrous and have tough seeds and skins. Most zucchinis are green although some varieties are light green or yellow. Crookneck squash has bumpy yellow skin with a crook at one end. Yellow squash have a smooth yellow skin. For most recipes, all three types can be used interchangeably.

The squash should be washed right before using. Cut a small portion of each end off the squash – there is no need to peel the skin. Squash also goes great with your favorite vegetable dip. Many herbs and spices, including basil, chervil, chives, dill, ginger, oregano, sage, tarragon, and thyme, complement squash. Summer squash is often a side dish. If stuffed, it can be a main course.

To eat them raw, slice, dice, or julienne them and then simply toss into your favorite salad.

For grilling, slice the squash in half lengthwise, brush with olive oil and your favorite herbs and grill directly on the rack over medium heat for 3 to 4 minutes per side.

To sauté, squash can be sliced, diced, or julienned. Place in a skillet over medium heat with a little olive oil and your favorite herbs.

If you find yourself with a larger squash, it is best to stuff it. Cut the squash in half lengthwise and scoop out the pulpy middle. Prebake or steam upright in a large pot to tenderize but not fully cook it. Stuff with your favorite filling such as pizza fixings or a precooked lean pork and vegetable medley. Place on a cookie sheet and bake until heated through.

Squash can be stored in the refrigerator. Yellow and crookneck can be kept for up to a week, but more delicate zucchini should be used in three to four days. Any bruises or damaged spots will deteriorate very quickly.