



Demystifying Winter Squash (it does NOT have to be boring!)

Winter squash, a mild-tasting, satisfying main or side dish vegetable, is loaded with immunity-boosting carotenoids, fiber, and essential minerals, helping optimize vision health, immune function, and digestion. It is extremely protective against diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer, and its nutrient density makes it a natural weight control aid. In spite of its versatility, healthfulness, budget price, and ease of prep, many people hesitate using it. This is a shame, because these winter gems can really spruce up meals and boost your nutrition.

Tracing back to Central America and Mexico, winter squash was a staple in Native American diets long before European colonization. The term “squash” comes from the Narragansett Native American word “askutasquash,” initially meaning “eaten raw or uncooked.”

Winter squash, unlike its summer counterpart, is harvested when fully mature, with a hard, thick skin and a longer shelf life, allowing it to be enjoyed throughout the colder months.

Varieties like butternut, pumpkin, acorn, and spaghetti squash are interchangeable in most recipes but impart unique flavors and textures.

When shopping, look for squash that feels heavy for its size, with a dull, matte skin, free of soft spots. A hard, thick rind indicates maturity and promises a longer storage life

In the kitchen, winter squash is incredibly versatile. It can be cubed and roasted, stuffed, mashed, and added to casseroles, salads, soups, and grain dishes. Experiment with online recipes that appeal to you, or browse cookbooks at home or in the library.

The seeds of winter squash can be eaten and are actually a nutritious and tasty snack. They’re rich in protein, fiber, and beneficial fats, magnesium, and zinc. To prepare squash seeds, simply scoop the seeds from the squash, rinse off any attached pulp, and let them dry. They can then be roasted in the oven with a little oil and your choice of seasonings—salt, garlic powder, or even cinnamon for a sweet twist. Roasting at a low temperature, around 300°F (150°C), until they are golden and crispy, will bring out their nutty flavor.

Sesame-Roasted Butternut Squash



Toasted sesame oil has a distinctive, luscious sesame flavor. It is dark-colored and comes in smallish bottles. It can go rancid relatively quickly, so best to store it in the fridge. Toasted sesame oil tends to be a bit pricier than other oils -- it's a real treat and you need a very small amount for big flavor. (You can find toasted sesame oil for less at Asian grocery stores and Trader Joes. Mainstream supermarkets charge more.)

You will need:

- 2 to 2.5 pounds of butternut squash
- 1 Tablespoon toasted sesame oil (you can substitute olive oil but the flavor is very different)
- 1 Tablespoon soy sauce

Preheat oven to 400 F. Peel and seed squash, then cut into 1 inch cubes. Toss with sesame oil and tamari. Spread out on a baking sheet and roast in the oven for about 30 minutes, or until tender. Garnish with sesame seeds and chopped parsley, if desired.

Note: If you don't have butternut squash, you can substitute acorn, spaghetti, delicata, or kabocha squash.