

SQUASH

The family of squashes is a large and varied group that is broken down into the hard skin, or winter squash, category; and the soft skin category, which consists of summer squash, cucumbers, and eggplant. The latter category is not generally thought of as squash, but it does fall into this grouping.

The winter and summer designation came from a time when those were the only seasons that such squash were available. Winter squashes grew into the autumn of the year and with their hard shells could last far into the winter if stored properly. Summer squash, such as zucchini, only grew in the warmer months and had a very short shelf life. These days summer squash is in the market year-round and many winter squashes can generally be found all year as well, although the quality is not the same as when they are in season.

Because the seeds of a squash are contained within them, squashes are truly a fruit. However, due to their almost universal savory applications, they are regarded and discussed here as a vegetable.

WINTER, HARD-SKINNED SQUASH

Winter squash arrive in the market from late summer to late fall but generally are available year-round or until late spring. Winter squashes all pack in 40-pound cases and should be held around 50° to 55°F/10° to 13°C. They come in an amazing array of colors and shapes on the outside and have light to deep orange flesh on the inside. The seeds are edible in all of the winter squashes, even though people usually only think of eating pumpkin seeds. Generally, the flesh of any of these squashes can be steamed, baked, or roasted. It can be removed from the rind before cooking and in some cases cooked and served in the rind. Each of these squashes has its own specific characteristic and flavor, but they are all similar enough to be used interchangeably. They are low-cost sources of good nutrition that add sweetness and color to the plate.

ACORN SQUASH

The acorn squash is so named because it is shaped like a large acorn, only with deep ridges that run from the stem to its tapered end. Most commonly seen in the market with a deep, dark green rind, they can also be found with yellow-orange to gold and multi-colored or even white rinds. This squash typically weighs 2 pounds/907 grams and is usually prepared by cutting it in half or quarters, scooping away the stringy fibers and seeds, and then roasting in the rind with butter and often spices. Other cooking options include steaming or sautéing the flesh once it has been removed from the rind. The flesh is sweet and fibrous, and darkens and softens as it cooks. The acorn squash is fairly popular, but is a bit less flavorful than many of the other winter squashes. These squashes should be heavy for their size, indicating high water content.

Pack Size: 40 lb/18.14 kg crates

Shelf Life: 1 to 2 months

Storage Conditions: 50° to 55°F/10° to 13°C

Season: Mostly available year-round but always better in the late fall to early winter



FIGURE 11.1 Acorn Squash

BUTTERNUT SQUASH

Butternut squash is a beige or dun-colored squash with a bulbous end and heavy, thick neck. The rind is tough, but not very hard and the squash can be cooked by baking with the rind on or in chunks after paring the rind off. The flesh is fine grained and sweet and almost has a sweet potato or nutty flavor. The consistency of the flesh can be a bit watery if the butternut was picked young; the older the squash the darker, drier, and sweeter the flesh will be. If the squash was picked too young there will be tinges of green at the stem end and running down its length in thin streaks; a squash that is too old will be beginning to dehydrate and lose its water

weight. Look for good, firm, heavy squash with more neck than bulbous seed end to improve yield. Avoid squash with soft spots, greening, or that are lightweight indicating moisture loss.

Butternut squash can be roasted in the rind with butter and spices. The flesh can also be steamed and puréed to use in a gratin, to make a luscious sweet soup, or in breads and muffins. Slow roasting or baking will enrich and enhance the sweetness of the flesh as compared to steaming.

Pack Size: 40 lb/18.14 kg crates

Shelf Life: 2 to 3 months

Storage Conditions: 50° to 55°F/10° to 13°C

Season: Mostly available year-round but always better in the late fall to early winter

Nutritional Information

Serving Size:	3-1/2 oz/100 g
Water:	86.41 g
Calories:	45
Protein:	1 g
Fat:	0.1 g
Saturated Fat:	0.021 g
Fiber:	2 g
Sodium:	4 mg
Iron:	0.7 mg
Potassium:	352 mg
Vitamin C:	21 mg

CARNIVAL

The carnival squash is similar in size and shape to the acorn variety with ridges running from stem to base. The hard inedible rind can either be a fairly pale green hue with flecks and stripes of dark green, or very pale yellow with orange splotches. Some rinds have areas of both colors.

The flesh of this squash is yellow with a rich sweet flavor, but it can be somewhat stringy.

The carnival squash can be steamed but is better baked or used in soup. As with the acorn squash, look for heavy, firm product with no cracking or soft spots.

Pack Size: 40 lb/18.14 kg crates

Shelf Life: 1 to 2 months

Storage Conditions: 50° to 55°F/10° to 13°C

Season: Mostly available in the late fall to early winter



FIGURE 11.2 Butternut Squash



FIGURE 11.3 Carnival Squash

DELICATA

Delicata squash is a very delicious heirloom variety. It is also known as the peanut squash, due to its crinkled rind and shape, or the sweet potato squash because of the similarity in flavor. The sweet, tasty flesh is creamy in texture and can be cooked by baking or steaming. The skin is more tender and delicate than many other winter squashes, and is actually edible, but not commonly eaten. The more delicate nature of this squash's texture may be the reason this heirloom squash at one time almost disappeared from the market, but the quality of its flavor is surely why it has come back. That more fragile constitution is why this squash is best used from late summer until early to mid-autumn when it is available at your local farm market. Look for good firm squash with no soft areas or mold and no signs of dehydration.

Pack size: 40 lb/18.14 kg crates

Shelf life: up to 1 month

Storage Conditions: 50° to 55°F/10° to 13°C

Season: Mostly available year-round but always better in the late fall to early winter

HUBBARD

The Hubbard is a monster winter squash that can grow from fairly large to massive in size, with a blue-gray, mottled, and warty rind. These squashes will often be sold cut in pieces as they can reach well over 20 lb/9.07 kg. There is also a relatively scarce golden variety, but the ugly, gray one eats much better, having a richer sweet flavor. That heavy rind also gives the Hubbard an excellent, long shelf life. The size of this squash can make it cumbersome to handle and lengthen its cooking times. The rind, stringy center, and seeds are inedible.

Despite the effort it takes to break down this big squash, the Hubbard's flesh is well worth the trouble. The sweet, dense, dark orange meat can be cubed and steamed or baked, puréed into a soup, or made into a great "pumpkin" pie. The flesh also freezes well. The pie is reputed to be better than the much more famous pumpkin alternative. Don't let this squash's looks or size scare you; when cooking for a crowd it is a good choice.

Pack Size: 40 lb/18.14 kg crates

Shelf Life: up to 6 months

Storage Conditions: 50° to 55°F/10° to 13°C

Season: Mostly available year-round but always better in the late fall to early winter

Nutritional Information

Serving Size:	3-1/2 oz/100 g
Water:	88 g
Calories:	40
Protein:	2 g
Fat:	0.5 g
Saturated Fat:	0.103 g
Sodium:	7 mg
Iron:	0.4 mg
Potassium:	320 mg
Vitamin C:	11 mg



FIGURE 11.4 Hubbard Squash



ZUCCHINI PANCAKES WITH TZATZIKI SAUCE

YIELD: 8 PORTIONS

Tzatziki Sauce

Plain yogurt	1/2 cup	120 mL
Sour cream	1/2 cup	120 mL
Grated cucumber, squeezed dry	1/2 cup	120 mL
Minced garlic	1 tsp	5 mL
Extra-virgin olive oil	1 Tbsp	15 mL
Chopped mint <i>or</i> dill	1 Tbsp	15 mL
Lemon juice	1/2 tsp	2.5 mL
Lemon zest	1 tsp	5 mL
Salt	as needed	as needed
Fresh ground black pepper	as needed	as needed

Zucchini Pancakes

Coarsely grated zucchini	12 oz	340 g
Salt	as needed	as needed
Chopped scallions	1 cup	240 mL
Large eggs, lightly beaten	4	4
All-purpose flour	3 oz	85 g
Chopped dill	1/2 oz	14 g
Chopped flat leaf parsley	1/2 oz	14 g
Chopped tarragon	1 Tbsp	15 mL
Freshly ground black pepper	as needed	as needed
Crumbled feta cheese	3 oz	85 g
Chopped toasted pine nuts	2 1/2 oz	71 g
Olive oil for pan frying, or as needed	2 cups	480 mL

(Continues)

METHOD

1. For the tzatziki sauce: Combine the yogurt, sour cream, cucumber, and garlic in a food processor and purée until smooth. Transfer to a bowl and fold in the olive oil, mint *or* dill, lemon juice, and zest. Stir until combined and season to taste with salt and pepper. Keep refrigerated until ready to serve.
2. Place the grated zucchini in colander. Sprinkle with salt and let stand for 30 minutes. Squeeze the zucchini to remove as much liquid as possible. Dry the zucchini by pressing it between several layers of paper towels.
3. In a large bowl, combine the zucchini, scallions, eggs, flour, dill, parsley, tarragon, salt, and pepper until evenly blended. Fold in the feta cheese. (The pancake mixture can be prepared to this point up to 3 hours ahead. Cover tightly and refrigerate. Stir to blend before continuing.) Fold the pine nuts into the zucchini mixture.
4. Preheat the oven to 300°F/149°C to keep the pancakes warm as you work. Place a baking sheet in the oven.
5. Add enough oil to a large skillet to come to a depth of about 1/8 in/3 mm, and heat the oil over medium-high heat until the surface of the oil shimmers. Working in batches, drop heaping tablespoons of the zucchini mixture into the hot oil, leaving enough room for the pancakes to spread as they cook. Fry until the pancakes are golden brown and cooked through, about 3 minutes per side. Transfer each batch of pancakes to the baking sheet in the oven to keep warm. Serve immediately with the tzatziki sauce.