

The English word "squash" derives from *askutasquash* (a green thing eaten raw), a word from the Narragansett language,

- Every part of the squash plant can be eaten, including the leaves and tender shoots, which can be cooked in omelets or made into soup.
- The term "**summer**" and "**winter**" for squash are only based on current usage, not on actuality. "Good keepers" became known as winter vegetables if they would "keep" until Dec.
- Most winter squashes are vine-type plants whose fruits are harvested when fully mature.
- They take longer to mature than summer squash (3 months or more) and are best harvested once the cool weather of fall sets in.
- They can be stored for months in a cool basement.

Squash Equivalents:

1/3 to 1/2 pound raw unpeeled squash = 1 serving

1 pound peeled squash = 1 cup cooked, mashed

2-1/2 pounds whole squash = 2-3/4 to 3 cups pureed

1 pound trimmed squash = 2 cups cooked pieces

1 pound squash = 2 to 3 servings

12 ounces frozen squash = 1-1/2 cups

1 medium-size (15 to 20 pounds) pumpkin = 5 to 7 quarts of cooked pumpkin.

Purchasing and/or Choosing Squash:

Winter Squash:

Winter squash matures on the vine and develops an inedible, thick, hard rind and tough seeds.

Choose firm, well-shaped squash that are heavy for their size and have a hard, tough skin.

Do not choose those that have sunken or moldy spots. Avoid squash with cuts or punctures in the skin. A tender rind indicates immaturity, which is a sign of poor quality in winter squash varieties.

To Store Winter Squash:

Place whole winter squash on top of thick pads of newspapers in a cool, dry, well-ventilated location, preferably between 45 and 50 degrees F. Check on a regular basis for rot and use within three to six months depending on variety of squash. Refrigerate tightly wrapped cut pieces of winter squash and use within 5 days.

To Prepare and Use Winter Squash:

Look for squash that feels heavy for its size and has hard, deep-colored skin free from blemishes.

All varieties are great for puréeing, roasting and baking. Once squash is cooked and mashed, it can be used in soups, main dishes, vegetable side dishes, even breads, muffins, custards and pies.

Peeling Winter Squash: Because this rind makes most squash difficult to peel, it's easier to cook the unpeeled squash, and then scoop out the cooked flesh. As many recipes do require peeling (and cutting) first, use a vegetable peeler to remove the skin and when cutting hard winter squashes.

Cutting Winter Squash: Winter squash have a hard skin and flesh (this includes acorn, buttercup, butternut, calabaza, delicate, Hubbard, spaghetti, sweet dumpling, Turban, and pumpkin).

To cut winter squash in half, grasp the squash firmly and use a sharp knife to slice through to the center. Then flip and cut the other side until the squash falls open. A serrated knife may make this easier. Remove and discard the seeds.

Hint: Place the whole winter squash in the microwave for 3 minutes; then cut it easily, remove seeds, add butter, etc, and put into hot oven to bake. (Perforate with knife before putting in microwave so it won't explode.)

Boil or Steam Winter Squash: Cut into quarters or rings 25 minutes or until tender. Boil or mash winter squash just as you would potatoes. Add peeled squash cubes to your favorite soups, stews, beans, gratins and vegetable ragouts.

To Make Squash Puree: Cut winter squash (any type) in half lengthwise and remove seeds. Place squash, cut side down, in a shallow pan on aluminum foil or Silpat-lined baking sheet.

Bake at 350 degrees F. until squash is soft, approximately 45 to 60 minutes (depending on the size of your squash). Remove from oven and let cool. When cool, scoop out the cooked flesh/pulp (discarding the shell), place the pulp in a food processor and process until smooth. Measure out the amount you need for your recipe, and reserve any remaining pulp (either in the refrigerator or freeze) for other uses. NOTE: This Squash Puree may be substituted in any recipe that calls for pumpkin puree.

To Microwave Winter Squash: Place halves or quarters, cut side down, in a shallow dish; add 1/4 cup water. Cover tightly and microwave on HIGH 6 minutes per pound.

Winter Squash may also be frozen raw. Simply peel, cut into chunks and freeze in a vacuum bag or freezer bag, removing as much air as possible to prevent freezer burn.