



Cooking with Squash and Pumpkin

My favorite time of year? Right now. Along with turning of the leaves and the crunch of dried leaves on the ground, it is the time for pumpkins and squash. I find it hard to wait to see what new shapes, colors and “warties” might appear. This past summer with all of it’s heat and ample rain seems to have afforded us a bumper crop and some very large ones. There are beautiful squash in blues, oranges, reds and greens, smooth skinned and warties. Pumpkins are found in assorted shapes and sizes. There are pie pumpkins that are best for cooking instead of the jack-o-lanterns.

If you grew your own, are picking your own, or just going to a market test their maturity. They are ready to harvest when your thumbnail cannot leave a mark. The more the stem looks like a corkscrew, the more mature it is. Be gentle with the stem especially if you are using it for decoration. If the stem breaks, it will spoil faster. Although it looks like a great handle, it can easily break off. As a preventative measure, wash in a mixture of 1 c. bleach to one gallon water and dry immediately. This should help get rid of bacteria that might cause rotting. Pumpkins should be cured for 2-3 weeks in a well-ventilated area out of direct sunlight. For long-term storage of pumpkins and squash, basements work well. The temperature should be between 55°F and 60°F. Leave space between them for adequate ventilation. Placing them on a wooden board or cardboard will absorb moisture and help them last longer. Depending on the storage temperature, humidity and type, they should last 2-4 months.

To me, fresh pumpkin and squash taste far better than that purchased at the store either frozen or canned. Generally, squash and pumpkin can be used interchangeably in recipes.

Plan on 1/3-1/2 pound of fresh pumpkin or squash per person if using as a side dish. To make a puree, cut into chunks and simmer for 20-45 minutes or until tender. It can also be roasted by cutting in half, scooping out the seeds and placing face down in a pan. Cook for about 45 minutes until the sides start to soften. Whether simmered or roasted, when cool, remove rind and puree or leave in chunks. Both pumpkin and squash can be pureed and frozen for up to 16 months.

Squash Soup

1 stick butter, melted
1 large onion, finely chopped
4 cloves garlic, chopped
46 oz. low-salt chicken broth
1 ½ lbs. butternut squash, cooked, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes
1 ½ lbs. acorn squash, cooked, peeled and cut into 1-inch cubes
1 ¼ tsp. minced fresh thyme
1 ½ tsp. minced fresh sage
¼ c. whipping cream
2 tsp. sugar

Sauté garlic and onion in butter until onion is translucent being careful not to burn garlic.
Place onion mixture, squash, herbs, whipping cream and sugar in food processor or blender.
Puree until smooth.

Place chicken broth and squash mixture in 5 qt. Dutch oven and heat until thoroughly warmed through.

Dish into bowls and garnish with Gruyere croutons.

Croutons

2 Tbsp. butter
24 - ¼" thick baguette bread slices
1 c. grated Gruyere cheese
1 tsp. minced thyme
1 tsp. minced sage
Salt and pepper

Preheat broiler.

Butter one side of bread and place on pan.

Broil until lightly toasted.

Turn bread over and sprinkle with Gruyere, thyme and sage. Sprinkle with salt and pepper.
Place in broiler, watching carefully, just until cheese melts.

Adapted from Epicurious.com

Pumpkin Pancakes

½ c. regular, uncooked oats
1 c. buttermilk
2 eggs
1 Tbsp. vegetable oil
½ c. pureed pumpkin
1/3 c. milk
1 tsp. baking powder
½ tsp. baking soda
¼ tsp. cinnamon
½ c. whole wheat flour
1/3 c. all purpose flour
2 Tbsp. wheat germ
1 Tbsp. sugar

Combine oats and buttermilk. Let stand 15 minutes to soften.

Mix together eggs, oil, pumpkin and milk.

Combine dry ingredients in a bowl. Make a "well" in the center.

Add the buttermilk mixture and blend just until dry ingredients are mixed in.

Bake on lightly greased griddle.

Top with cinnamon whipping cream or chopped pecans.

Squash, Pear and Gorgonzola appetizer

Pizza crust

1 butternut squash, rind removed and thinly sliced

4 large, firm pears, diced

8 oz. Gorgonzola

1 Tbsp. fresh thyme, minced

Olive oil

Salt and pepper

Mesclun salad mix

Preheat oven to 400°F.

Place pizza crust on pan or pizza brick.

Brush pizza crust with olive oil.

Arrange squash and pear slices on pizza crust.

Brush squash and pears with oil to keep from drying while baking.

Sprinkle with Gorgonzola, thyme, salt and pepper.

Bake 15-20 minutes until pear and squash are just tender.

Slice and garnish with salad mixture.



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