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BE WELL

## Gourd-geous Squash!

By Debbie DeAngelo  
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Mother Nature showers us with many delights this time of year, and one of my personal favorites is winter squash. With dozens of varieties from which to choose, the culinary possibilities are endless.

A member of the gourd family, squash is classified as a fruit and is bursting with nutrition. It's a rich source of beta-carotene, vitamin c, magnesium, potassium, fiber, and protein. Toss the seeds in some oil and seasonings before roasting and they make a delicious snack full of omega 3 fatty acids, fiber, protein, potassium, calcium, magnesium, and iron. When selecting winter squash, they should be

firm and feel heavy for their size. They can be stored at room temperature in a cool, dry place. Although perusing this oddly shaped and colored produce may be intimidating, cooking with it is fairly easy. So, grab your apron and try these popular autumnal all-stars.

**Pumpkin.** We're not talking about jack-o-lanterns here. Edible pumpkins aren't the same as carving pumpkins. Often called sugar, sweet or pie pumpkins, once you roast, puree, and bake into a pie, you won't want to go back to the commercially canned kind. It's also good for muffins, breads, and pancakes. For a savory dish, try pumpkin chili, pumpkin sage gnocchi, or pumpkin risotto.

**Delicata.** Even though all winter squash skins are edible, and provide an extra fiber boost, not all of them are palatable. Delicata is one exception. The skin readily softens when cooked. Slice this oblong squash into rings without peeling, roast, and eat in its entirety. Delicata has a sweet taste, and the skin adds a nutty flavor.

**Spaghetti.** An often-cited reason given for disliking spaghetti squash is that it's "mushy." This simply means that it's been overcooked. Like pasta, it shines with more of an al dente texture. Besides being delicious, it's become a popular, low-carb alternative to pasta. Once baked or microwaved, shred the inside into long spaghetti-like strands with a fork. Add your favorite sauce, such as marinara, pesto, or extra virgin olive oil with garlic.

**Acorn.** Shaped like its namesake nut, this squash is quite easy to prepare. It's the ideal size and shape for stuffing. Experiment with a mixture of chorizo (or other sausage), fennel and apples or quinoa, mushrooms, and pomegranates. For a fun spin on breakfast, top baked acorn squash with Greek yogurt, honey, and pecans.

**Butternut.** Perhaps the most frequently used type of squash, its versatility is hard to beat. Since it can be tough to cut when raw, microwave it for a few minutes to soften it enough to slice. Butternut can be enjoyed roasted and drizzled with maple syrup and cinnamon or used as ravioli filling, added to mac 'n cheese, or made into soup.

**Kabocha.** Also referred to as the Japanese pumpkin, kabocha is sweet with a creamy, custard-like texture when cooked. It's notorious for having a tough rind, so you may want to soften the raw squash in the microwave prior to cutting. Eat it mashed or use it in soups, stir-fry, and desserts such as pie and muffins.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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