

A collection of various squash and pumpkins is arranged on a dark wooden surface. In the foreground, there is a large, dark, ribbed pumpkin on the left, a small orange pumpkin, a large white squash, a small green and white striped pumpkin, a medium orange pumpkin, and a large orange pumpkin with a dark stem on the right. In the background, a large white squash is visible. The upper left corner features several yellow autumn leaves on a dark branch. The background is a soft, out-of-focus green and yellow, suggesting an outdoor setting.

The Many Shades
of Squash

Squash is a colorful, all-season fruit that most of us think of as a vegetable. Experts argue that, because (by definition) a fruit contains seeds and they are grown from the flowers of a plant, squash is a botanically a fruit. Regardless of what you call them, squash come in many colors, shapes, and varieties – making it a very versatile ingredient for both savory and sweet dishes.



What's So Great about Squash?

The health benefits of squash are many. It's low in calories, but high in fiber, nutrients, vitamins, and minerals. In most squash, you'll find Vitamin A, Vitamin C, Vitamin E, and B vitamins. Its high Vitamin A content gives it a powerful antioxidant quality, which is good for skin, vision, and mucous membranes – and may even help reduce the risk of lung and mouth cancers. Antioxidants are

also anti-inflammatory, which can help reduce the risk of inflammation-related health problems such as asthma, rheumatoid arthritis, or irritable bowel syndrome. Finally, squash has a high carotene content, giving it anti-cancer benefits. Studies have linked squash and its healthy, nutrient-rich profile with health benefits such as improved bone strength and vision, better circulation, heart and lung health, diabetes management, and much more.

Varieties of Squash

Squash is one of the oldest cultivated crops on the planet, with a wide variety that are harvested throughout the year. As such, most varieties are typically designated as either winter or summer squash. Whether you like it raw, roasted, or hidden in a baked good, squash can provide a wealth of health benefits. Let's get to know the many shades of some of the world's most popular types of squash!

Zucchini

This green summer squash is so versatile, it can be prepared just about any way you can dream up. The warmest summer months are when you'll find the best tasting zucchini, but it's available year-round. In the summer, zucchini is great raw or marinated for a cool, fresh salad dish. Or try it sautéed, steamed, or on the grill for a perfect side that provides fiber, flavor, and lots of nutrition. Some unique ways to enjoy the health benefits of



zucchini include zucchini bread or zucchini hummus, both of which are easy to make.

Yellow Squash

Otherwise known as summer squash, yellow squash is harvested in the summer and has a tapered shape that often includes a “turn” at the neck. It can be eaten raw as a crunchy crudité or chopped in a salad. Its mild flavor makes it easy to pair with poultry, cheese, and a variety of spices – and it goes well with its “sister squash” zucchini. Most commonly served sautéed or baked in a casserole, yellow squash can provide a beautiful yellow color to any dish throughout the year.

Spaghetti Squash

Due to the long, stringy strands you’ll find inside a spaghetti squash, this winter variety is a perfect substitute for gluten-filled pasta. Cooking it is simple – just cut the squash in half, scoop out the seeds, and bake it until it’s soft. It can be served



topped with tomato sauce for a true pasta-like experience, but spaghetti squash also tastes great with garlic, olive oil, or your favorite greens and spices. The flavor of spaghetti squash is mild on its own, lending itself to pairing with virtually any type of protein, herbs, or type of cuisine.

Pumpkin

While most people think of pumpkin as a fall or winter food, it’s great year-round. This hearty winter squash can be

used in soups, chili, baking or by itself – and the seeds have a ton of great, nutty flavor. While you can cut and roast your own pumpkin when they’re in season, most recipes taste just as great with organic, canned pumpkin. One cup of canned pumpkin provides 7 grams of fiber and is a great way to incorporate flavor into many dishes. Pumpkin pairs well with spices like cinnamon, nutmeg, ginger, and cloves (the ingredients in the popular pumpkin spice blend), as well as sage and pepper.

Butternut Squash

A popular winter squash, butternut squash is nutritious and has a naturally sweet flavor that lends itself to baking, roasting, or sautéing. Its bright orange color is perfect for soups, and it pairs well with chicken or pork. Common herbs used with butternut squash include sage and rosemary, and it’s often used in dishes with fruits such as tart apples or cranberry.





Butternut Squash

This beautiful squash also tastes great with leafy greens or beans of nearly any variety.

Acorn Squash

Another winter squash, acorn squash is smaller than many winter varieties, making it a bit easier to prep and cook. Combining with flavors such as honey, maple, cinnamon,

cloves, or nutmeg make acorn squash a sweet treat. But acorn squash also pairs well with herbs such as rosemary, sage, thyme, or tarragon and can be served with sausage, bacon, pork, walnuts, and greens such as spinach, kale, or broccoli. It can be roasted in halves or slices, sautéed, or steamed and mashed.

Don't Forget the Seeds!

Many winter squash have large seeds that can be washed and roasted to create the perfect high-protein snack. The squash that lend themselves best to roasting include: pumpkin, butternut, and acorn squash. Here's how to roast them:

1. Scoop the seeds out of your favorite winter squash.
2. Wash the seeds under running water and remove any strings or squash pieces.
3. Let them dry completely on paper towels or newspaper.
4. Line a cookie sheet with aluminum foil or parchment paper.
5. Grease the pan with cooking spray (oil in a spray bottle works well).
6. Blend your favorite combination of spices and combine with seeds in a large zip-sealed bag.
7. Roast at 400°F in a preheated oven for approximately 10 minutes.

Seedy Seasoning Ideas

- Keep it simple with sea salt and pepper.
- Give it a dash of flavor with onion or garlic powder.
- Spice it up with cayenne pepper or chili powder.
- Sweeten things up with cinnamon and/or nutmeg.

Roasted squash seeds taste great by themselves, on top of salads, in or on top of bread, mixed with oatmeal, or anywhere else you want to add some crunch packed with flavor and protein.



Acorn Squash

Squash Recipe Roundup

Not sure where to get started with squash? Here are some tried-and-true Beyond Diet recipes to add to your meal plans.



[Beefy Spaghetti Squash Boats](#)



[Parmesan Squash Slices](#)



[Pumpkin and Coconut Milk Soup](#)



[Crockpot Chicken with Butternut Squash](#)



[Spicy and Cheesy Toasted Pumpkin Seeds](#)



[Chocolate Zucchini Banana Muffins](#)