



CHEAT SHEET

What To Do With Winter Squash

Though there are many different types of winter squashes available in grocery stores and farmer's markets, you can cook them all in basically the same ways with two notable exceptions. Delicata squash, the oblong yellow-skinned squash with faint green stripes, run smaller than most other types, with just a thin layer of flesh, and skin so delicate you can eat it. Delicatas do best baked or roasted. The other distinctive variety is spaghetti squash, which has watery, stringy flesh as opposed to the starchier, creamy flesh of most winter squash. Those do best with baking. For everything else, try these tried and true prep methods:

Bake it: Best for straight-up eating.

Preheat the oven to 375°F. Using a heavy chef's knife, slice away any woody stem, then cut the squash in half from stem to stern. Using a heavy spoon, scrape out all the seeds and stringy membranes from the central cavity. (You can boil and roast most winter squash seeds the way you roast pumpkin seeds - itself a winter squash.) At this point you can choose to roast the squash cut-side-down, the fastest way, or cut-side-up, with seasonings and/or fillings, like chopped apples, nuts and dried fruits. You can rub the exposed flesh with a little olive oil, coconut oil or pastured butter before baking, but it's not necessary. To bake your squash face down, arrange the halves on a baking sheet and cook for 30-60 minutes, depending on the size and thickness of the squash. You will know they are done when a spoon pressed into the side gives with relative ease. To roast them face up will generally take 45-90 minutes. The process can be speeded up by adding about a cup of water to the baking pan and covering the squash with a layer of aluminum foil for the first 30-45 minutes of cooking time.

Slow cook it: Best for baking, i.e. pies, breads, pancakes, etc.

To slow cook any winter squash, use a heavy chef's knife to slice away any woody stem. Cut the squash in half from stem to stern. Using a heavy spoon, scrape out all the seeds and stringy membranes from the central cavity. Then half or quarter the two halves so they are small enough to fit into the bowl of your slow cooker. Cook on low for 6-8 hours until tender. Scrape the soft flesh out of the skins to use, refrigerate or freeze. If you like you can season the squash with salt, pepper, herbs and spices for a savory dish, or pour in a little apple cider and season with sweet herbs like cinnamon, allspice and nutmeg. If it's a large squash and you want to use it for more than one dish, I recommend cooking it plain.

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What To Do With Winter Squash, continued.

Roast it: Best for sweet variations, quick lunchbox snacks and medleys with other seasonal vegetables, like sweet potatoes and carrots.

Preheat the oven to 400°F. The easiest way to roast squash is to cut away the peels with a knife or vegetable peeler, then use a heavy chef's knife to slice away any woody stem. Cut the squash in half from stem to stern. Using a heavy spoon, scrape out all the seeds and stringy membranes from the central cavity. Then dice the halves into 1½ -inch chunks. (If roasting delicata squash, you can slice the whole squash into thin rounds, including the skin and seeds, and roast them in one even layer.) In a large bowl, toss the pieces with a light drizzle of olive oil, melted coconut oil, melted pastured butter or melted ghee and a little salt and pepper. You can also add savory spices like rosemary or cayenne, or sweet ones like Chinese 5 spice or ground garam masala, if desired. Lay them out in an even layer in a roasting pan and roast for 25-45 minutes, until squash is tender and lightly caramelized.

Steam it: Best for “mashes” like a lower-carb topping to shepherd's pie, a creamy alternative to mashed potatoes, or a blended mash with other steamed root vegetables or even fruits, like carrots, parsnip, celeriac root or apples.

To steam squash, set a large soup pot with a steaming basket on to boil. You can prepare the squash as for the slow cooker or for roasting. Steam for 15-30 minutes until squash is tender. If you steam large pieces, you can scoop the flesh out of the skin once cooked.

