

All You Need To Know About Cooking With Squash

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff
LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.)

— This is the season to make good use of the abundant supply of squash.

Recently Althea Engle, Lancaster extension agent, held two workshops on cooking with squash. She prepared many recipes, which participants taste-tested at the workshops held at the Farm and Home Center in Lancaster. She also demonstrated easy methods of preparing squash.

Squash contains abundant supplies of Vitamin A and potassium. In fact, one-half cup of canned pumpkin provides five times the U.S. RDA for vitamin A and 10 percent of the minimum requirement for potassium.

The richest source for Beta-carotene (which the body converts into vitamin A) is found in squash — the darker orange, the more beta-carotene.

Beta-carotene is cited by the National Cancer Institute and the American Cancer Society as a possible dietary inhibitor of certain cancers — including those of the lungs, skin, and the digestive system. Other studies show that people with diets high in beta-carotene have a lower risk of developing certain cancers than those who consume less beta-carotene.

Beta-carotene is important to the body in other ways as well. Medical experts say this nutrient also plays a role in good vision, healthy skin, a strong immune system, and bone and tooth development.

There are many different varieties of squash — every one of them nutritious. Experiment with the different varieties. Some are so tender and sweet that people enjoy them without any seasoning or only a minimal amount of seasoning. One of the favorites for this is Carnival squash.

Although many varieties are interchangeable, some varieties make better pies than others. Generally neck pumpkins, butternut or acorn squash is used in pies, cakes, cookies, and bread baking.

When buying neck pumpkins, buy the longest neck possible as there is more food value in the neck and the body contains mostly seeds.

Raw squash and pumpkin can easily be prepared by cutting it in half, turning upside down on a baking dish and baking in the oven at 350 degrees for about 30 minutes or until soft. Or, pierce the skins in several spots, place in the microwave, and microwave on high speed until soft. Do not add water when baking as squash retains moisture.

Remove from the oven or microwave, split open, remove seeds and pith, scoop out pumpkin. Mash and use as desired.

The traditional way to prepare cooked pumpkin from a whole ripe one, is to wash the outside and dry it. Then split in half with a knife. Remove the seeds (the seeds may be roasted and eaten after shelling). Cut halves into strips and cut pulp away from tough outer husk. Cut the pulp into cubes, place in a saucepan, and add a scant half a cup of water. Do not add excess water as pumpkin is quite watery in itself. Cook over low heat until cubes are soft. Mash and use as desired.

Steam a winter squash like acorn or butternut in the microwave. Add canned pineapple or applesauce to sweeten the squash.

Here are some recipes from the workshop.

MICROWAVE PUMPKIN SQUARES

- 1 cup all-purpose flour
- ¼ cup brown sugar
- 1 cup canned pumpkin
- 2 egg whites or 1 whole egg
- ½ teaspoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- ¼ teaspoon salt
- 1 teaspoon pumpkin pie spice
- ½ cup chopped nuts
- ¼ cup raisins

Place all ingredients in a mixing bowl. Blend at slow speed; then beat at medium speed for one minute. Spread batter in 8x8x-inch glass baking dish.

Place on an inverted saucer. Microwave at 50 percent power for 6 minutes, rotating ¼ turn every 1 to 2 minutes. Increase power to high. Microwave 5 to 6 minutes, rotating ¼ turn every 2 minutes. Do this until very little unbaked batter appears through the bottom of the dish. Let stand 5 to 10 minutes. Cool. Frost with light cream cheese frosting.

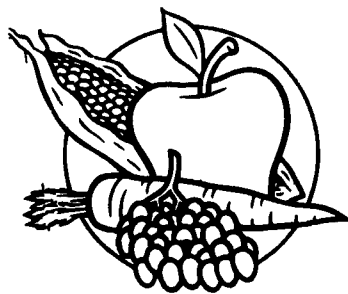
Light Cream Cheese Frosting:
3-ounces light cream cheese
2 tablespoons soft butter
1½ to 2 cups confectioners' sugar

Combine cream cheese and butter in mixing bowl. Microwave on high for 10 to 20 seconds or until softened. Blend well. Beat in sugar until it is of spreading consistency. Spread on cooled squares.

BUTTERNUT SQUASH AUX FINES HERBS

- 1 large butternut squash
- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- 1 large onion, thinly sliced
- 3 large mushrooms, thinly sliced
- ¼ cup nonfat or low-fat chicken stock
- 1½ teaspoons minced fresh chervil or ½ teaspoon dried chervil
- ½ teaspoon fresh tarragon or ¼ teaspoon dried tarragon
- 1 tablespoon fresh minced parsley
- 1½ teaspoons fresh snipped chives

Peel the squash, remove the seeds and cut into ¾-inch cubes. To make peeling easier, prick the squash with a fork and microwave on high for 5 to 10 minutes. Heat the oil in a large nonstick frying pan over medium-low heat, and add the onions and mushrooms. Sauté for about 5 minutes or until the onion softens. Add the squash and nonfat chicken stock. Cover tightly and cook until the squash is tender, approximately 20 minutes. (If you are using dried chervil and tarragon, add after 15 minutes of cooking. Remove the cover, and cook a minute or two longer to evaporate most of the remaining liquid. Sprinkle on the parsley and chives, and also the fresh chervil and tarragon, if used. Makes 4 (1 cup) servings.



Althea Engle, center, prepares a variety of squash recipes while extension workshop participants watch at the Lancaster Farm and Home Center.

SQUASH STUFFED WITH RICE

- 1½ cups cooked rice
- ½ cup chopped walnuts
- ¼ cup cracker meal
- 1 medium onion, finely chopped
- 2 egg whites, slightly beaten
- ½ teaspoon ground sage
- ½ teaspoon nutmeg
- 1 tablespoon chopped fresh parsley
- 2 tablespoon brown sugar
- Freshly ground pepper
- 3 buttercup or acorn squash, halved and seeded

Combine rice, walnuts, cracker meal, onion, egg whites, sage, nutmeg, parsley, brown sugar, and black pepper.

Spoon mixture loosely into squash halves. Bake in foil-covered pan until squash is tender. Oven: 350 degrees for 60 minutes. Makes 8 servings.

SPICY APPLE-STUFFED SQUASH

- 2 squashes, acorn or butternut
- 1 McIntosh apple
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ¼ teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1 teaspoon butter
- 3 tablespoons brown or white sugar

Wash squashes. Cut in half crosswise; remove pith and seeds. Place in a baking pan with cut side down; bake at 350 degrees for 30 minutes. Mix spices and sugar together. Core and slice apple; mix apple with spice-sugar mixture. Turn squash halves cut side up in pan. Brush with butter. Arrange apple slices in squash halves. Cover pan. Bake 25 to 30 minutes until apples are tender. Serve.

ORANGE SPAGHETTI SQUASH

- 1 spaghetti squash (about 3¼ pounds)
- 1 tablespoon unsalted butter, softened
- ½ cup fresh orange juice
- ½ cup minced fresh parsley leaves
- 1 tablespoon julienne fresh orange peel

In a kettle of boiling water, boil the squash, turning it occasionally, for one hour, drain it and let it cool for 10 minutes. Cut the squash in half and discard the seeds. Scrape out the flesh with the tines of a fork, transferring it to a serving dish, season it with salt and pepper, and dot it with butter. Drizzle the orange juice over the squash, sprinkle the squash with the parsley, and garnish it with the rind. Makes 4 servings.

Beef Equal To Chicken In Reducing Cholesterol

HOUSTON, Texas—When a cholesterol-lowering diet is prescribed, new research indicates lean beef can stay on the menu.

Researchers at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston have determined eating lean beef in a cholesterol-lowering diet produces reductions in levels of total blood cholesterol and LDL (low-density lipoprotein—the “bad” cholesterol) similar to those achieved by eating chicken.

“The keys to keeping beef in a heart-healthy, low-fat diet are the amount of fat in the meat and the portion size,” said Lynne Scott, director of the DeBakey Heart Center’s Diet Modification Clinic at Baylor and The Methodist Hospital and the study’s principal investigator.

The beef and chicken used in the study were prepared by scientists at Texas A&M University and contained only 7 or 8 percent fat. Portion sizes totaled less than three ounces of meat per 1,000 calories daily.

The 13-week study involved 38 healthy men with cholesterol levels higher than 240 mg/dl. After a three-week period to stabilize their diets, the men were provided with their food for 10 weeks.

For five weeks, all participants

followed a typical American diet with 40 percent of calories from fat that contained both lean beef and chicken entrees. Then, for five weeks, half the men ate chicken and half ate lean beef as their only entree as part of the American Heart Association’s Step-One Diet for lowering cholesterol.

Cholesterol levels were reduced by similar percentages in both groups.

“The study results mean lean beef and chicken are interchangeable

in the Step-One Diet,” Scott said. “Now we can offer more variety in cholesterol-lowering diets and, hopefully, help patients avoid becoming bored and abandoning their healthier eating plans.”

Results from the study, which was funded by the National Live Stock and Meat Board, were published in the June 13 edition of the Archives of Internal Medicine.

The DeBakey Heart Center is a joint program of Baylor College of Medicine and The Methodist Hospital supporting cardiovascular research, treatment and education.

Be A Winner With Wool

MECHANICSBURG (Cumberland Co.) — The Pennsylvania Make It With Wool Contest will be held, Saturday, November 19, at the Holiday Inn, Harrisburg West, located at Mechanicsburg. The contest brings attention to the beauty and versatility of wool and encourages its use. Sewing, knitting, and crocheting skills are also recognized.

Competition divisions are preteen — 12 years and under; juniors — 13- to 16-years; seniors — 17 to 24 years, and adults, 25 years and older.

The state preteen winner will receive a Baby Lock sewing

machine, and the adult state winner will receive a Baby Lock serger machine.

Only junior and senior state winners are eligible to compete in the national contest held February 8 to 11, at Washington D.C. where more than \$20,000 in prizes will be awarded.

All entries for the state contest must be received by November 5. For information on how to enter, contact one of the following state co-directors: Marie-France Reyes, 2103 Timberglen Dr., Imperial, PA 15126 (412) 695-0878. Janet Mawhinney, R.D.#2, Box 141D, Waynesburg, PA 15370.