

Squash are fruits of the gourd family and date back in culinary history to 5500 BC. Generally, squash can be divided in to two types -- [summer](#) and winter squash. Summer squash have thin skins, edible seeds, and require very short cooking times. Zucchini, pattypan, and crookneck are examples of summer squash with a peak season early through late summer. Choose summer squash that are firm, free of wrinkles and blemishes. Sauté, steam, deep fry, or [eat](#) raw for best flavor. Winter squash have thick skins, tough seeds, and dense flesh that requires longer cooking times. Butternut, turban, acorn, and spaghetti are types of winter squash and are available fall through winter. Choose winter squash that are heavy for their size and bruise-free. Roast, steam, bake, or puree. For specific types of summer squash, see crookneck squash, pattypan squash, and zucchini. For specific winter squashes, see acorn squash, banana squash, butternut squash, pumpkin, and spaghetti squash

Winter Squash Soup with Sage

Prep and Cook Time: About 85 minutes

Notes: Choose a squash with deep orange, sweet flesh, such as butternut, kabocha, red kuri, or buttercup. If making up to 3 days ahead, start at step 2, using plain olive oil. Continue through step 4. Cover and chill.

Up to 1 day ahead, fry sage leaves, wrap in paper towels, seal in a plastic bag, and hold at room temperature. Cover and chill sage-flavor oil. Reheat soup, thinning, if desired, with more broth--it thickens on standing. Add sage oil. To make 12 servings, double the recipe and use a 5- to 6-quart pan.

2 tablespoons olive oil
18 fresh sage leaves (about 11/2 in.)
2 3/4 to 3 pounds winter squash
2 unpeeled onions (about 6 oz. each), cut in half
6 unpeeled cloves garlic
1/4 cup chopped parsley
1 tablespoon chopped fresh sage leaves
3/4 teaspoon fresh thyme leaves or dried thyme
4 cups fat-skimmed chicken or vegetable broth
Salt & Pepper
1/2 cup diced fontina cheese

Pour oil into a 6- to 8-inch frying pan over medium-high heat. When hot, add whole sage leaves and stir until they turn darker green, 45 seconds to 1 minute. With a slotted spoon, lift out leaves and drain on paper towels. Reserve oil.

Rinse squash and, if whole, cut in half and scoop out and discard seeds. Brush cut surfaces of squash and onions with a little of the reserved oil. Lay vegetables, cut side down, in a 10- by 15-inch pan. Slip garlic under squash.

Bake in a 375° oven until all vegetables are soft when pressed, 45 to 60 minutes. Reserve juices. Scoop squash from skin. Peel and chop onions. Peel garlic. Discard skin and peels.

In a 3- to 4-quart pan, combine squash, onions, garlic, parsley, chopped sage, and thyme. Mash squash mixture with a potato masher. Stir in reserved juices and broth. Stirring often, bring to a boil over high heat. Cover, reduce heat to low, and stir occasionally to blend flavors, 15 to 20 minutes.

Add the remaining sage cooking oil and season soup with salt to taste. Before serving, distribute cheese equally among individual bowls. Add soup, top with fried sage, and sprinkle with pepper.

Per serving: 187 cal., 41% (77 cal.) from fat; 11 g protein; 8.6 g fat (2.9 g sat.); 18 g carbo (3.5 g fiber); 153 mg sodium; 14 mg chol.

Makes 6 servings

Butternut squash muffins

2 cups sugar
1-1/2 cups vegetable oil
4 large eggs
1 cup cooked butternut squash puree
1 cup unsweetened applesauce
1 tsp. vanilla
1 tsp. finely grated lemon rind
3-1/2 cups flour

2 tsp. baking powder
2 tsp. baking soda
2 tsp. cinnamon
1/4 tsp. ginger
1/8 tsp. salt
1 cup soft, plump raisins
1 cup finely chopped dates
1/2 cup finely chopped walnuts

Preparation -

Generously grease 2 muffin tins or line the tins with paper muffin cups.; set aside. In a large mixing bowl combine the sugar, oil, eggs, squash puree, applesauce, vanilla, and grated lemon rind. In a separate bowl, mix the flour, baking powder, baking soda, cinnamon, ginger and salt together. Add the dry ingredients to the other mixture and mix just until the dry ingredients are moistened. Add the raisins, dates, and walnuts and stir to mix well. Spoon the batter into the prepared muffin tins. Bake in a preheated oven at 350° for 20 minutes or until the muffins are nicely browned and a toothpick inserted in the center of a muffin comes out clean. Remove the baked muffins from the tins to cool on wire racks.