



# Growing with MO

## Harvest of the Season

A Missouri Farm to Preschool Newsletter

December

## Winter Squash



### Did You Know?

- A pumpkin is a kind of winter squash.
- The seeds of most winter squash can be roasted and eaten.
- Bright orange vegetables like butternut squash are great sources of many important vitamins and minerals plus fiber.



### Read Together

**Pumpkin Circle** by George Levenson

**Sophie's Squash** by Pat Zietlow Miller

### A Long Lasting Vegetable

We know that all fresh fruits and vegetables eventually spoil, but some last longer than others. Winter squash will keep up to three months if stored in a cool, dry place. It is protected by its hard skin. In the book *Sophie's Squash*, Sophie wants to keep a butternut squash as her friend instead of letting her family eat it. She babies it into the winter and sees her friend go through some interesting changes.

### How to Prepare a Winter Squash

Many people have never eaten this delicious vegetable because they don't know what to do with it. This is a hard vegetable and you have to get through the skin to reach the delicious part that you can cook and eat. Here are some tips to make cutting it easier.

1. Use a sturdy, sharp chef's knife. The knife should be 8 inches or longer.
2. Slice a little bit off one end to make a flat surface. This keeps it from rolling around.
3. With the flat surface on the cutting board and a steady hand, cut the squash in half.
4. For easier cutting, you can soften the skin by microwaving the whole squash about 5 minutes. Just poke a few holes in it first to allow steam to release.
5. Scoop out the seeds and you're ready to roast!

### Cook Together

#### Squashed Spaghetti

Follow the directions above to prepare the spaghetti squash for roasting. An adult needs to do the cutting. Place both halves in a baking dish and roast in 400 degree oven for 40 to 60 minutes until fork tender. Some people put the cut side down in the pan. Others put the cut side up. Try it both ways and see which you like best.



**Here comes the fun part...** Cool the cooked squash so little hands won't get burned. Then let children use a fork to gently scrape the squash out of the shell. Like magic, it starts to look like spaghetti!



## Shop Together

Winter squash comes in different shapes, sizes and colors. Some of the prettiest ones are used for decoration as gourds. The most common varieties that we eat are butternut and acorn. Look for those in the store and see if you can also find some of the more unusual ones.

When shopping, always choose squash that is firm and heavy with no soft spots or gashes through the skin. It doesn't hurt if they have some marks on the outside.



Acorn



Butternut



Turban



Kabocha



Delicata



Hubbard

## Science Corner

### Explore Seeds

If you've ever made a Jack-o-lantern with your child and had them scoop seeds out of the pumpkin, you know whether they like this messy experience or not. Exploring the inside of any kind of winter squash can be a fun learning experience.

Give your child a spoon and let them scrape the seeds and stringy part out from a raw cut squash. Ask them to describe what they find.

- How does it feel?
- Is it hard, soft, mushy, slimy?
- What does it smell like?
- Do you think we should eat this part?
- What color are the seeds?
- What do you think would happen if we planted the seeds in the ground?

Seeds planted outside in the winter will stay dormant or "asleep" until warmer weather. Some seeds get into the ground accidentally from compost or last year's plants. If conditions are right, they might sprout in the spring as volunteer plants.

Try burying a few seeds in the ground and see what happens late next spring!



## Tips for Using Winter Squash

- Spaghetti squash has a very mild flavor. Add some shredded parmesan cheese and try seasoning with garlic, basil and thyme. Or just top with your favorite spaghetti sauce.
- Butternut and acorn squash taste good flavored with cinnamon and nutmeg.
- Cubed butternut squash is a great addition to many winter soup and chili recipes.
- Wash and dry squash seeds, then roast them with vegetable oil and a little salt for a crunchy snack.



*Growing with MO Harvest of the Season* is a project of the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services Team Nutrition Program. Young children learn about Missouri grown fruits and vegetables through preschool classroom experiences, gardening, field trips and through eating these foods in meals and snacks when they are in season.

[www.health.mo.gov/growingwithmo](http://www.health.mo.gov/growingwithmo)



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